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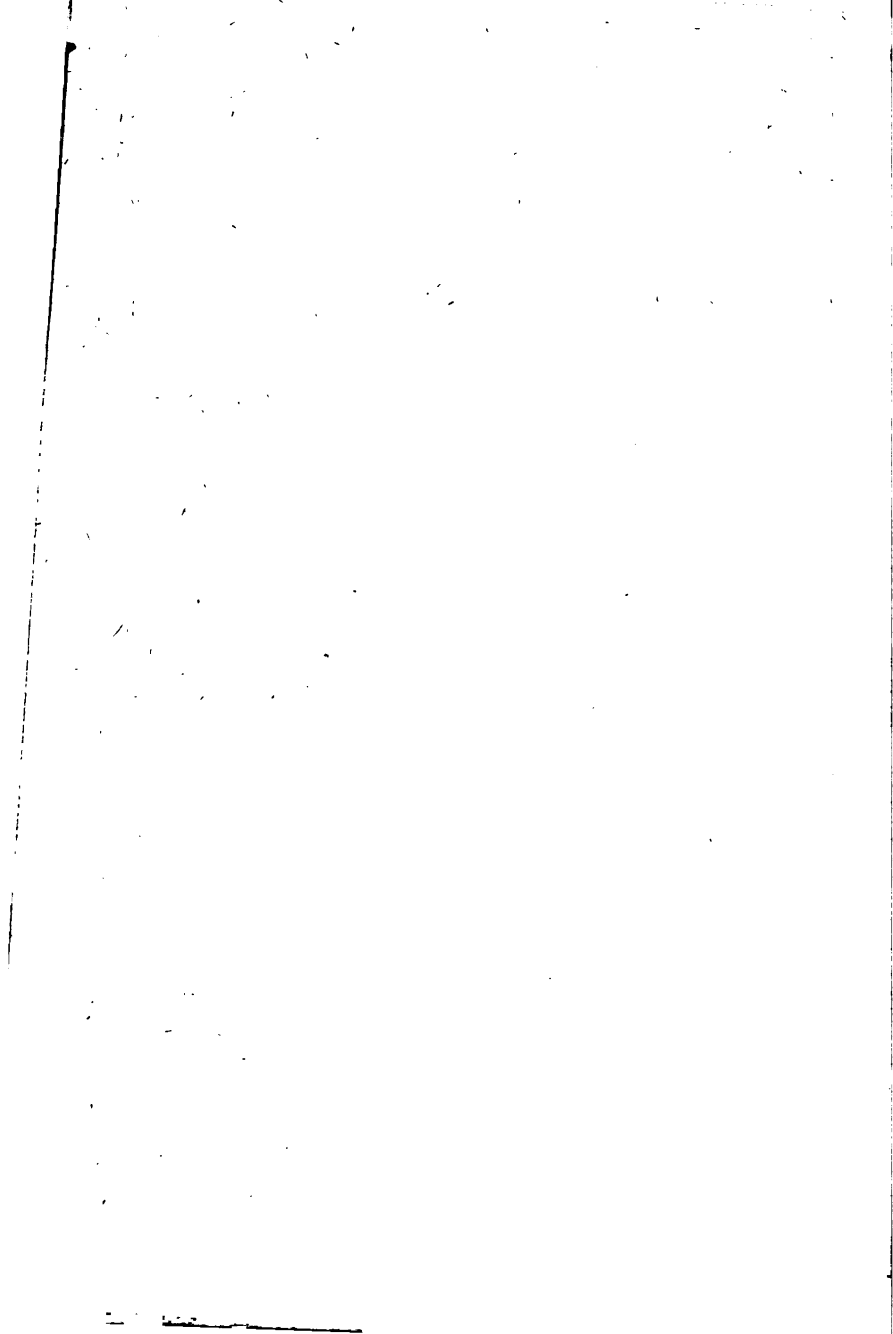
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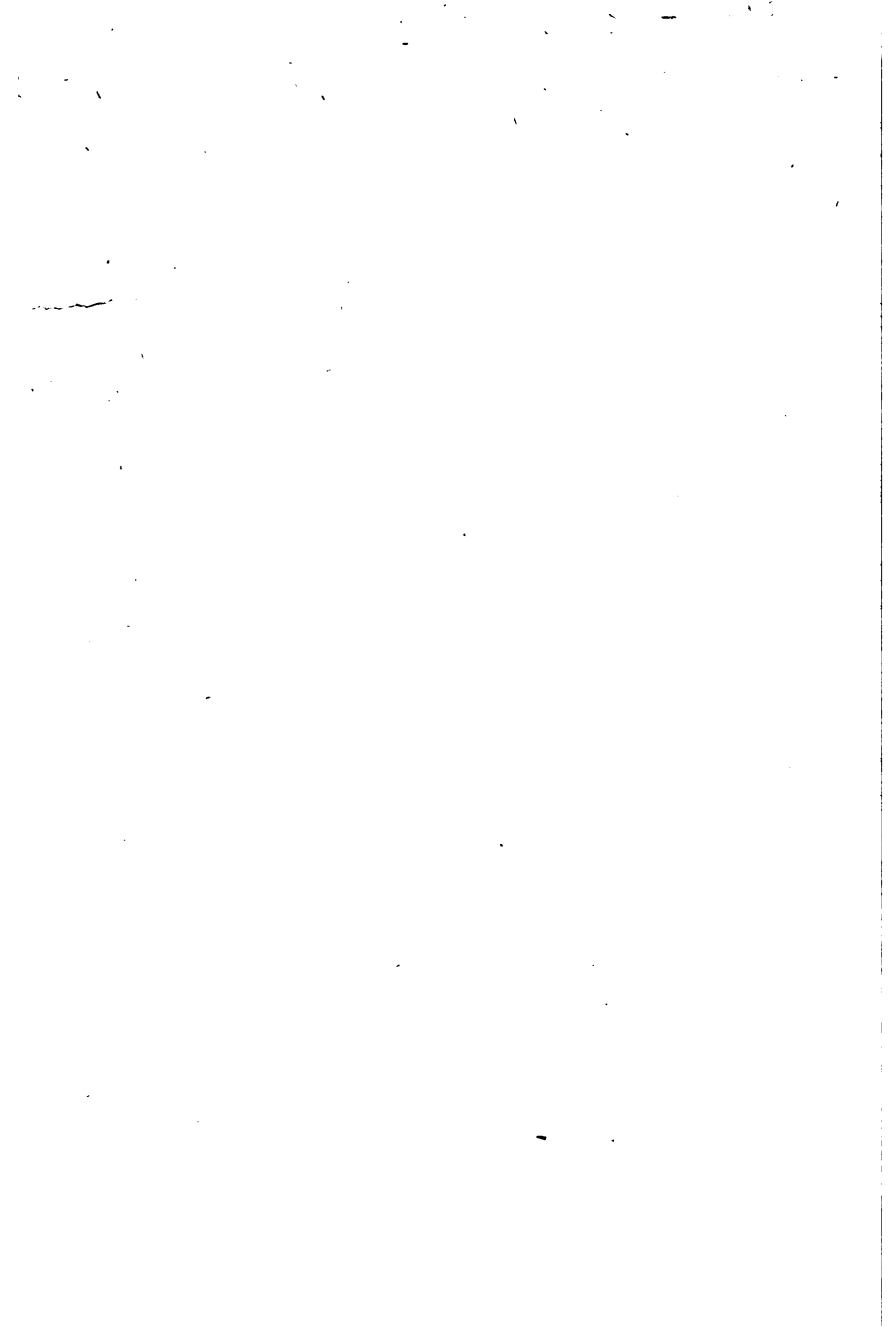
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THE  
STEEL HAMMER

*A NOVEL*

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LOUIS ULBACH

AUTHOR OF "MADAME GOSSELIN," ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

By E. W. LATIMER

NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY.

1888



~~ULIS~~

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# THE STEEL HAMMER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE OVERTURE.

ABOUT twenty years ago, the three clerks in the office of Maître Boisselot, a notary in one of the suburbs of Paris, were making the most of the temporary absence of the head of the firm to tell all sorts of stories about him, and to confide to one another all their love-affairs.

They were interrupted at the most interesting moment—the very moment when each young Don Juan, incited by emulation, vanity, or a love of drawing the long-bow, was about to reveal the name of the lady who was to be his future conquest—by a knock at the office-door.

A young man with an intelligent face, pallid, however, from overwork, sickness, or anxiety, and with restless, anxious eyes, presented himself with a letter in his hand, and, in a pleasant voice, though somewhat out of breath, asked humbly if Maître Boisselot was in.

“No!” replied the youngest of the three clerks, somewhat roughly.

He was provoked at having lost the opportunity of informing his elders how much notice Madame Boisselot was disposed to take of him; and, besides, he belonged by birth, instinct, and vocation to that class of French employés—very numerous in our day—which was never intended to serve the public, but for whom the public is a natural prey.

It will be understood why, after this, I abstain from telling exactly what suburban district Maître Boisselot set up his conjugal

establishment, and flaunted the imperial arms over his office-door.

The reader is at liberty to locate him where he pleases, provided he chooses some place not far from Paris and on the bank of the Seine—Saint-Cloud, for instance, Suresnes, Puteaux, Neuilly, Courbevoie, or Asnières, to which places, however, I would not wish to limit his suppositions.

"Will he be in soon?" asked the visitor, whom the little clerk had snapped at so fiercely.

The head clerk, who in the absence of the chief took his place in the office, and whose dignity forbade him to bark and snap at strangers, said, with an assumption of importance:

"Have you come to speak to Maître Boisselot about business, or is it only that you wish to see him?"

"I have received this letter, and have come as soon as I could. Am I too late?"

As he said this, somewhat timidly, he put out his hand toward the desk with the letter. The chief clerk snatched it at once, and, glancing over it, said:

"Ah! then you are Monsieur Jean Mortier?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You have come about the money left by Monsieur Mortier-Fondard? No, you are not too late. On the contrary, the letter names four o'clock, and it is only three. Besides, even if Monsieur Boisselot were in, he could do nothing without the presence of Monsieur Pierre Mortier."

"Ah!" said Jean Mortier, with a half-sigh, turning a little paler than before, "is my cousin summoned, too?"

The chief clerk smiled.

"Of course. Are you not both in the same degree heirs of the deceased?"

Jean Mortier, in his turn, had a gleam in his eye, sudden and flickering, and a smile came to his lips when the clerk uttered the word *heirs*.

"I will come back again," he said, softly.

"Oh! no; you can wait," said the chief clerk, with a sigh of resignation.

"I am afraid I shall disturb you," said Jean Mortier."

This time the clerks made him no answer. He had made his remark out of pure politeness, having no idea of departing because

he had arrived before his cousin. He thought, indeed, it was a piece of luck. Fortune might work some miracle in the will, in order to reward the one of the two heirs who had been most eager to court her good graces.

He took a chair. He carried it into one corner of the office, and, to disarm both the hostility of the clerks and avert any evil influences that might chance to be hovering around the place where reposed the written testament, he sat down noiselessly, turned his head away from the three young men, and set to work to study the backs of the bundles of law-papers arranged on shelves around the office, above the stand for the portfolios, and the pictures of the chief officials of the department.

Did he realize that those dusty archives, each packet of which was ticketed with its own date, were the glory of all law-offices; that false ones are sometimes exhibited when the office is not so fortunate as to be possessed of many old ones; and that these yellow papers are intentionally never dusted, like wine-bottles at a wine-merchant's that are engarlanded with cobwebs, or the big empty bottles with mysterious tickets, and the pots of fancy salves, which are the unfailing ornaments of all druggists' establishment?

He looked as if he were admiring them. Most likely he did not even see them. At the end of five minutes his eyes seemed fixed on one particular bundle of papers, but his thoughts were far away; they were rushing after the notary, after the cousin he expected; he was half wild with impatience, though he sat so still. Some drops of sweat, which he dared not wipe from his forehead, attested his anxiety. From time to time he opened his mouth to give passage to a sigh, which he arrested before it passed his lips; and one of his hands, which held his cap, a cloth cap such as is worn by artisans, kept smoothing it slowly, rolling it up, squeezing it together, and then suddenly it would be stretched out with a gesture of utter weariness and despair.

Jean looked like a man who was half a workman, an artisan who has set up for himself.

His jacket of brown cloth was almost a coat. His cravat and his shoes were those of a tradesman who goes round to houses to take orders. But his apron of green stuff, which showed under his jacket, and his upholsterer's hammer, with its long handle, which stuck half out of the front pocket of the apron, showed that he was a fellow who "looked after his own business," as they say in the

counting-room. Jean did put his own hand to his work, and he had just broken off some that he was eager in doing, to come as fast as possible on the summons of the notary.

He was tall, thin, and well made, with a quantity of black hair thrown back from his face, and displaying a high, broad forehead, but his look also indicated either a confirmed habit, or the affectation of a habit, of indulging in sad, passionate, and feverish thoughts—the kind of thoughts which make a man pass his hands through his hair nervously. He had expressive eyes, dreamy yet resolute; a small, well-formed mouth, a mustache as black as his hair, and shapely hands—manifestly the kind of hands to plait up stuffs, and possibly to model in plaster. Jean Mortier needed only to unfasten his green apron, and to change his hammer for a sheaf of painters' brushes or a sculptor's tool, to have passed for an artist anywhere.

The clerks made believe to be very busy. But the youngest made too much noise with his pen to be writing, and the one above him did not make enough. He had a pencil in his hand, and looked up at Jean Mortier more often than he would have done had he not been busy with a sketch of him, or rather a caricature.

As for monsieur, the chief clerk, he was visibly writing with rapidity and attention—only it was not on office-paper, and it was more likely to her whose client he was than to any client of his master, Maître Boisselot.

Jean Mortier had been waiting about twenty minutes when the door of the office was again opened.

"Is Monsieur Boisselot in?" asked a rough voice, the voice of a peasant. He was dressed in a coarse cloth jacket, with heavy shoes upon his feet, and a hat with a broad brim, which he did not remove till he felt himself firmly balanced on two legs that were by nature somewhat bandy.

His face was red, with no particular expression, and a good deal furrowed. It was that of a cattle-breeder or a horse-dealer. It was easy to see that he was a man accustomed to attend markets, and to settle his transactions at the *cabaret*. He walked up to the big desk, that had two fronts to it, on which the clerks were leaning, much as if he were in a drinking-place and going up to the counter. A sharp-cornered shirt-collar of coarse linen, showed that he had brushed up his toilet for the occasion. The collar kept rubbing against his whiskers, which were cut round below his cheek-bones. His waistcoat was of black velveteen, with metal buttons. He had

taken it out of his closet for this visit, but it was so short in the waist that it was with difficulty dragged down to meet the waistband of his trousers. These trousers were of corduroy, and every time he moved the shirt peeped out, like a line of white foam, between the two disjointed parts of his habiliments.

"Maitre Boisselot is out," replied the chief clerk, who then put the same question he had before put to Jean Mortier.

"All right," he said, when it was answered, "you can wait with this other gentleman, who is here on the same business."

The peasant turned quickly, frowned, and then cried out, with an air of forced gayety:

"*Tiens!* Is that you cousin?"

"How are you, Pierre?"

"Better than you are, I should think, for you look as sallow as a Parisian. . . . *Ah, ça!* Have they sent for you, too?"

"Yes. It seems that our uncle's will concerns both of us."

Jean said this with rather a troubled voice. Pierre began to laugh, but very probably his laugh was not quite genuine.

"I fancied I was going to be the only one concerned," he said. "But, never mind, the pile is big enough for both of us."

"Ah! you think——"

"Uncle had at least a hundred thousand francs of one kind and another."

"A hundred thousand francs!" repeated Jean, with his lips trembling; and a bright light came into his eyes which betrayed or rather increased his anxiety and suffering.

"Yes; so that, if the will divides it between us——"

"Divides it!" exclaimed Jean, with a sigh.

Pierre misinterpreted the sigh.

He suddenly seized a chair, sat down close to his cousin, and, tapping him on the knee with a familiarity as little sincere as his late laugh, said:

"Do you happen to know anything about it, cousin?"

"No; I know nothing except that I was ordered to come here to-day."

The peasant turned toward the clerks.

"And you, gentlemen," he said, "have you any idea what your employer is going to tell us?"

The clerks, whose fun had been broken in upon, but who were all ready for anything else in that line, grinned at one another.

This impatience on the part of an heir was nothing new to them, but it always diverted them.

"Maitre Boisselot is not in the habit of telling us things before the papers have to be drawn out," replied the one in authority.

"All right. We'll wait."

After a short silence, Pierre began in an insinuating tone :

"Ah ! ça, cousin, it's a long time since we saw each other. That's the way in families. If there were no funerals, no marriages, and no wills, one never would meet ; and even now Uncle Matthieu—unsociable old rascal !—died and was buried without letting us know. And you too, Jean, never asked us to your wedding."

"I felt sure you would not come."

"Well ! perhaps not. Ah ! ça, are you a happy pair ?"

"A happy pair, . . . yes."

"Have you any children ?"

"One little girl, three years old."

"No more than that ? And business—how does that get on ?"

"Ah ! business !"

Jean raised his eyes to the ceiling.

Pierre saw at once part of the secret of his cousin's paleness, and by an impulse that was not ill-natured, but simply the exuberance of a lucky man who is sensible of his own advantages, he slapped his breeches pockets, saying :

"Well ! I am satisfied. Since the Empire came in, cattle have been high. Fodder is plenty. But a little farm like mine costs a great deal. One has to be stirring, and then fertilizers are so dear. The more people invent, the more money it takes to keep up with their inventions. People will end by rotting bank-notes into the soil. I tell you frankly that, if uncle has left me my share, he has done me a big service !"

"Did you see him often ?" asked Jean.

Pierre, who had taken off his round hat and put it between his legs, ruffled up his hair with a wave of his hand :

"Yes," he said, "I went to see him sometimes."

He emphasized the word *sometimes*, with an air of importance.

"I never went," said the upholsterer.

"It was unlucky," the peasant could not refrain from saying, with a swelling of his breast that seemed like sorrow, "that I did not go and see him the week he died. But there was a fair at Provins—a cattle-fair. I could not miss it. I was greatly vexed when I came

back and found the letter that told me he was dead. . . . I only hope he did not think it hard of me."

"Oh! he wouldn't think it worse of you than of me."

"We shall see. . . . I have not put on mourning yet; . . . nor have you, as far as I see."

"I have had too much mourning in my heart of other kinds!"

Pierre again looked at his cousin, and seemed satisfied with this inspection.

"It is true," he said, "that he was displeased with you for preferring the city to the country, and for having married without consulting him."

"I did everything I could, however, to make him forgive me; . . . I wrote to him kindly a month ago."

Pierre drew back his chair.

"I did not know of that," he said.

"You might have known of it, since you saw him so often."

"Bah! He was so close-mouthed. What did you say to him in your letter?"

Jean hesitated. He had let himself be drawn on to say more than he intended. He was rather sorry for it. He looked at the clerks. The one who took the place of the notary, and whom the chat between the cousins either did not amuse or amused extremely, either wishing to hear no more or to hear it better, here interrupted them:

"If you like to go into Maître Boisselot's private room, gentlemen," he said, "you may find it more agreeable to talk there."

Pierre and Jean Mortier bowed, and went into the room pointed out to them. There they were nearer to their uncle's will. A swinging door of green oil-cloth, on which a copper plate with black letters was fixed, seemed to make a double door, and to shelter the private room of the notary from indiscreet ears. But it chanced that the wooden door was open, and neither of the two cousins ventured to close it, while as to the swinging door it closed after them of itself, but in such a way as to leave a crack open, so that all those in the office with a little care and attention could hear whatever was being said in Monsieur Boisselot's own room.

When the two cousins had settled themselves a second time (this time in two arm-chairs), the farmer asked again:

"What did you say to uncle in your letter?"

"The truth—that my affairs were going wrong; that, do what I could, I could not make both ends meet; that I was getting into



debt; that I was expecting the moment, alas! when I should be obliged to give up my shop; and then I asked him to forgive me."

"That didn't show much spirit on your part."

"One does not seem to care for spirit when one has a wife and a little girl."

Pierre became crimson.

"*Sacré bleu!*" he said, "I never would have asked him for a five-franc piece to buy tobacco with, and I sent him all his brandy. Didn't he answer you?"

"Yes."

Pierre's arm-chair creaked under him as he turned it round sharply, without rising.

"Then," said he fiercely, "you know what to expect in the will? . . . you have come here feeling certain."

"No. Uncle answered that, as soon as his rheumatism allowed him to come up to Paris, he would come and see me, and satisfy himself as to the state of my affairs; that he was not angry with me. . . . But that was three weeks ago. He never had the strength, or the time, or the will, may be, to make the visit. He told me not to come and see him. . . . I waited for him very impatiently. . . . My wife made a *neuvaine*—a nine days' devotion—at Saint-Genève, for his cure. Instead of his visit, I got the notary's letter; . . . he was dead, and, like you, I was not even notified to attend his funeral."

"No; it must have been his thief of a housekeeper who prevented that."

Pierre's face was still very red, but he had lost, or he concealed, some of his ferocity.

"If you told him about your wife and little girl," he said, "I think that may have touched him. Uncle when he was young had a very kind heart. . . . I knew that he had settled up his affairs six months ago, but, since you have received a letter just like mine, it is to be supposed that we are treated alike."

Pierre made a great effort to calm himself. He gave a sigh. Jean sighed in his turn.

"I trust so," he said; "if not, what will become of me? And my wife? And the little one?"

"Is your trade a bad one?" asked Pierre, almost kindly. "What is it you are doing, exactly?"

"I am an upholsterer."

"You went away from home to be an artist."

"Yes; I was too ambitious. I have had to content myself with a trade where there is some room to show taste. . . . I am fond of it. I think I should be able to do as well as most men, if I had just some little capital. But the working upholsterer only makes up material that is given him. He can not invent new things. The few things that he has to buy use up all his resources. And, then, my wife has been sick. . . . Since I married, four years ago, I have been getting more and more into debt, and, just as the notary's letter reached me, I received a notice on stamped paper—the last one before a failure. . . . If to-morrow or the day after I have not anything to give my landlord on account, I shall be evicted, sold out, and all for want of two thousand francs! . . . So, you see, I am very anxious. It seems as if the notary would never come."

He got up, went to the window, lifted up the curtain, looked out into the street, saw nothing, and came back to his seat.

"So it seems people do fail in Paris," Pierre growled. "I thought it was all a trick that they printed in advertisements, and put up over the doors of their places of business to attract customers."

"Yes, cousin, men do fail, and they kill themselves sometimes in despair, when they see their wife and child reduced to poverty."

"That's nonsense. That won't help them."

"What can a man do—unless he robs a safe, or waylays men in dark places to take their purses?"

"Luckily, cousin, you have had the same letter as I. And uncle, you say, forgave you?"

"May God hear you!" cried Jean, wiping his forehead.

Pierre's face had a queer smile. He thought the exclamation rather odd. Devil take him if he had been thinking of any appeal to Heaven.

"And so," he resumed, with cruel persistence, "you are not prosperous?"

"No."

"You had better have stayed at home; done as I did, planted cabbages for your own eating, and sown wheat to have something to sell; seen a little fun sometimes, and not have married."

"Ah, don't say anything against my marriage! It is the only joy in my life."

"Is your wife very pretty?"

"She is very good ; and very brave and patient."

"And the little one ?"

Jean could not repress a smile.

"My little girl is very pretty. I hope she will grow up as good as her mother."

Pierre, who had been thinking since he recovered himself, drew his chair close up to his cousin's, and said in a tone of rough *bon-homie* :

"Do you know, an idea has come into my head. Since they have called us together about this inheritance, let us keep together, make a partnership of the inheritance. How would you like it, cousin ?"

"I don't understand," stammered Jean.

"Well, we are both going to be his heirs, are we not ?—or, may be, one will have more than the other. Let us put our shares together. My trade is better than yours. Oh, I can prove it to you ! Let us both take up my business, and give up yours. It can be a partnership ; you can pay your landlord, you can sell what things you have, and you can come and live with me at La Ferté-Muiron. There's plenty of room there for your wife and little girl. It will do them good to have country air, and fresh eggs from my chickens. Your wife seems to be rather devout, since she goes in for *neuvaines*. There's no harm in that. Our *curé* is a very good fellow ; she can take him for her confessor. You can set to work. Between ourselves, it is not very difficult. . . . It's a deal easier than knocking nails with that little tool. . . . I should mash my fingers—"

Pierre was getting lively ; he put his finger on the hammer which was sticking out of Jean's apron-pocket.

The upholsterer, much embarrassed by the proposition of his cousin, was glad of the chance to make no reply. He pulled his little tool out of his pocket, and, handing it to Pierre, said :

"It is a present that was made me by my fellow-workmen in the shop, before I was married, when I invented a new way to drape hangings, and a certain mode of hanging curtains, which got a medal at the exposition."

"Did you get a medal, cousin ? I have had a medal, too ; I got it at an agricultural exhibition."

"Oh, I did not get the medal. My master put it on the head-  
ing of his bills. But my comrades thought I ought to be rewarded, and they gave me this themselves."

Pierre was handling the hammer.

"It is a very pretty thing," he said; "the handle is ebony, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The end looks as if it were silver."

"It is steel, but beautifully polished."

"Ah! well, you can bring your hammer to the farm with you. We will use it to nail up the big harvest nosegay."

"No, Pierre," said Jean Mortier, gently, taking back his hammer. "It will have to go on helping me in my trade; and if some day I want to smash my skull—"

He made a movement of placing the hammer on his temple and of striking a sharp blow.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"What a notion!" he said. "But, then, you could not do it. . . . So you decline my proposal?"

"Yes, cousin; but I thank you. If the will is favorable to me—"

He spoke those words in a trembling voice, hardly loud enough to be heard.

"But if it should not be," he added, "perhaps you could help me with two or three thousand-franc notes, and I would go on working at my business."

Pierre became unfriendly.

"So you prefer poverty?"

"I love work. All that has kept me back has been a want of capital. As a journeyman, I could always make a living, but I wanted to set up for myself before I had laid by enough money. I have suffered for it."

"That means that you are willing to work for other people, and not for me?"

"No; when one has gained one's liberty it is better to keep it, I told you, cousin, that if I could pay my debts—and two or three thousand francs would be enough—I could go on; I could get straight. I have good courage—my wife and daughter would give it me if mine failed. My business is really a good one. The present taste for luxury in houses is in its favor. . . . All the same, Pierre, I thank you for your kind thought of me. I will tell my wife how good you were."

He stretched out his hand to his cousin, who made believe he did not see it. The farmer was wounded both in his pride and pocket. This refusal of partnership, on the part of a man who was

going undoubtedly to inherit quite as much as himself, seemed to him like a kind of robbery.

He got up from his chair and began to walk up and down Monsieur Boisselot's room, to calm the blood which he felt rising to his head, and whistling carelessly.

Jean saw that he had wounded him, and, wishing to be friends with him, said, softly :

"You must not be displeased with me, cousin. Perhaps we can find some other way. Anyhow, come and see me, and make acquaintance with my wife and with the little girl."

"Where do you live?"

"In the village of Boulogne."

"What! in the Bois de Boulogne? If you expect to find customers there—"

"No, not in the Bois; but I have custom in the village. I am not badly lodged. Come and see. That is one reason why it would be so hard for me to go away. I have families I serve at Auteuil, at Saint-Cloud, and Saint-James, . . . When we have done here, come home and dine with me."

"I can't, to-day," replied Pierre, roughly.

"Then promise me to come soon."

"Some other time, may be."

"I will give you my address."

Jean felt in his pockets for a card. The only one he found there was that of a sheriff's officer. He did not dare use that to write down his address, but, rising in his turn, he took off of the notary's desk a gray envelope, and, with a great square pencil he always carried about with him to take measurements, and whose black mark was almost as dark as ink, he wrote down his name, street, and number.

"*Tiens!* Pierre, when you want to come and see me, or to write to me—"

The farmer dared not refuse the envelope. After all, the offer might yet be accepted. Jean's wife, possibly, was not so proud as he, and, so long as the contents of their uncle's will were uncertain, it was better to keep friends with a man who might just as likely have the bigger part as an equal share.

He took the envelope and put it in his side-pocket.

He, however, had no time to renew his own offers, or even to exhibit any more ill-humor.

The street door suddenly opened, a magisterial step was heard. Then a few words passed between the chief clerk and the new-comer.

"Are they in there?" asked a sonorous voice.

The swinging door was pushed aside, and Maître Boisselot came in, in haste, with his bag of papers in his hand.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE WILL OPENED.

THE two cousins rose, and stood up stiffly like two soldiers when an officer comes into a guard-room.

The young notary was rosy of face, with light whiskers all across his cheeks, like the imperial arms on the sign over his door; he had gray eyes, and his mouth was drawn into that inevitable smile which belongs to a man who feels his own importance in the world. He was tight buttoned in a frock-coat, which marked the curve of his "fat round paunch." He was satisfied with himself, doubtless satisfied with his office, and he seemed to the two men, on his entrance, brilliant, solemn, and imposing as Fate itself.

He made them a slight bow, flung his bag stuffed with papers on one of the chairs in his office, sat down in his own arm-chair with the head of a sphinx carved over the top of it, took off his gloves, (in which his fat red hands were tortured) with some difficulty, laid them on the edge of his hat, which he had put down before him, and said, in quite an ordinary tone:

"Pray, excuse me, gentlemen, but I was detained by an inventory."

Jean's face became livid. He set his teeth to hinder them from chattering. He looked at this notary, young, smiling, more fit it seemed to him to preside over marriage contracts than wills and testaments, and said to himself it was impossible that bad news or a deception could proceed from such a man.

Pierre grew crimson.

"It's no matter—no matter, Monsieur the Notary," he said, trying to hide his emotion under the sonorousness and volubility of his words.

The notary pulled his watch out of his fob quickly, and slipped it back again, saying :

"Very true. I am not behind time, but I ought always to expect my clients to be beforehand when it is a matter of inheritance."

He laughed.

Jean had not strength to smile. But a faint flush came over his paleness like a ray of sunshine passing over snow.

Maitre Boisselot opened the drawer of his office-desk and drew out a big envelope, the seal of which had been broken by the judge of the First Chamber of the Tribunal of the Seine; then drawing out a paper folded in four, and leaning back before he unfolded it, he said gravely :

"Gentlemen, Monsieur Mortier-Fondard, your uncle, had he lived a few weeks longer, or even a few days, would have probably altered the will which he had put into my hands, and with whose contents I was acquainted. He had sent for me, and we had a long conversation on the subject.—You are Monsieur Jean Mortier?" added the notary, turning toward the upholsterer.

"Yes," answered Jean, with a choking in his voice which made it hardly audible.

Maitre Boisselot, growing graver and graver, went on : "You wrote to monsieur, your uncle, a very touching letter, which he communicated to me."

"Ah!"

"And it was by reason of this letter that he had intended to make some changes in his will."

Jean clutched the arms of his chair with nervous fingers. The blood was mounting to his head. He saw a gulf yawning at his feet. He closed his eyes, not daring to look into it.

Pierre, on the contrary, who, at the first words of the notary, had shrunk back in his arm-chair, now sat forward on the edge of it.

"Unfortunately," resumed Maitre Boisselot, with genuine compassion, "monsieur, your uncle, who was very tired that day, put off till the next day, and then till the day after, what he intended to do. I heard of his death as I was preparing to go and see him . . . so that—"

Jean's mouth moved, as if he said inaudibly :

"Then I have nothing."

He could not make a sound. He shook his head, then let it drop back on his chair.

A vision rose before him. The notary's room seemed suddenly invaded by a flood of black water. The Seine, which was not more than a hundred and twenty yards away, seemed to him to have risen over the quay, to have overflowed the street, to be bearing him away into its bed, that refuge of despair. He felt the chill water flow over his breast; he was resigned to drowning.

The notary went on, addressing the farmer :

"The will of your uncle, as it affects yourself, remains unchanged, therefore."

"I am his heir, then—sole heir!" cried Pierre Mortier.

"Yes, monsieur; sole heir to all the property, real and personal, including a considerable sum of money in bank."

"I am heir to it all!"

The peasant gave a rapid glance at his cousin, a look of anxiety as well as of triumph. He could hardly believe what he had heard. Suppose he should still be forced to go shares with Jean?

He turned his eyes upon the notary, who, having unfolded the testament, was reading it aloud.

The will was formal and precise. Everything had been so arranged that the heir could enter into immediate possession.

"Then I have it all!" he could not help repeating with a chuckle of delight.

The notary bowed, folded up the will, laid his hand upon the paper, took a magisterial attitude, and said with a decided lisp:

"I summoned you both here, gentlemen, with no intention of giving pain to Monsieur Jean Mortier by the spectacle of the satisfaction of his cousin; but because I thought it my duty, while communicating to the sole legatee the testamentary dispositions of Monsieur Mortier-Fondard, to bear testimony, in the first place, to him who is not named in this paper, that he is the victim of a fatality, and must not, on that account, curse the memory of his uncle—"

Jean shook his head. The curse had fallen too heavily upon himself for him to think of cursing. Pierre checked a smile that was rising to his lips.

"And I thought," continued the notary, "that Monsieur Pierre Mortier, when he learned the intentions of his deceased uncle, and remembered that, had he lived twenty-four hours longer, his own



interest in the property might have been considerably less, would possibly honor the memory of his benefactor—"

Pierre here interrupted him with—

"Benefactor! I am his legal heir!—"

"Yes, but no nearer than your cousin."

"I don't say anything about that; but it is not my fault if he left my cousin nothing."

"It depends on you whether you will carry out the wishes of your uncle."

"What proof have I as to his wishes?"

"Only my word."

Pierre dared not accuse Maître Boisselot of an intention to steal his property, but he growled out:

"Then you advise me to set aside the will?"

"Oh, no! I did not say that," said the notary, with a smile.

"It is all in due form, is it not?"

"Perfectly."

"It could not be broken?"

"No."

"Well, let me sign anything there is to sign, count me out any money you may have to give me, and as to the rest let me settle it."

"Is that a promise to Monsieur Jean?"

"I don't promise anything. I won't promise—he wouldn't, half an hour ago."

Pierre had risen from his chair and was leaning against the notary's desk as if he were taking possession of the ground which contained his treasure. He turned his back upon his cousin.

He stood leaning forward in this attitude while Maître Boisselot, biting his lips, and forced to give up his point, for fear of incurring the enmity of a new client, rose and went to his safe, whose secret lock creaked as he opened the door.

He drew out a roll of bank-notes, which he held out to Pierre Mortier.

"Here are your twenty-five thousand francs in cash which are mentioned in the will," he said; "I know that, it was part of this sum that your uncle intended to remit at once to Monsieur Jean—"

"Did he tell you to tell me to do so?"

Pierre took the notes, and, with a kind of vulgar bravado, shook them as if he were going to give them back to the notary.

"No," said Maître Boisselot.

"Then," replied Pierre, closing his hand over the roll of notes and crumpling them, "is it undoubtedly all my own?"

"Most certainly. As to his furniture and other property, and certain debts—"

"All right—all right! One can't do everything in one day. I will come back and see you."

Pierre stuffed the twenty-five thousand francs into a pocket of his jacket. He tried in vain to get them entirely into an old dilapidated pocket-book, whose clasp, worn out by long service, would not close over the leather.

Jean sat motionless in his chair. He did not hear what was being said. All he heard was a voice in the far distance—his wife's voice, asking with hope and trembling:

"How much did your uncle leave you?"

Nor did he see what was passing. He only saw his pretty little girl playing quietly in one corner of his shop. For two weeks past, since her mother had been constantly in tears, the child had been very quiet. When Jean had left home that morning, he had bent over her and said:

"To-night, I shall hear your little tongue wagging; I am going to bring you a beautiful doll."

The child had kissed him with a smile. He seemed to see her crying beside her mother, and as pale from disappointment at not getting her doll as her mother would be at the thought of not paying the baker.

The notary called for his chief clerk and dictated to him two or three formal law-papers that Pierre Mortier would have to sign.

Jean did not stir.

When all was finished, the farmer, having made arrangements for another interview with Maître Boisselot, was in haste to get away—to breathe forth his satisfaction in the open air. He made one step toward the door; but meeting the eye of the notary, and fancying he saw in it either pleading or reproach, he turned back and said to the upholsterer:

"Good-by, cousin."

Jean started, half-roused from his vision. He, too, rose. He looked like a beggar ashamed of his vocation.

"Are you going?" he said.

"Yes; it is getting late. I want to get back to Paris."

"Pierre, don't go like that!"

Jean's voice had the soft accent of his wife's, and something like the whimper of his little girl's.

"Oh, I don't bear malice," replied Pierre, with a loud laugh, self-conscious, but not cruel, for he did not know how to get away.

Jean made great efforts to pull himself together.

"I don't think I have done anything to offend you," he said, humbly, holding out his hand.

He probably only meant to ask a friendly pressure, and was not begging for money. It is not certain that he had even seen Pierre stuffing his pockets with bank-notes.

Pierre looked at his outstretched hand with an air so insolent, so curious, and so full of mockery, that the upholsterer in confusion drew it back and put it behind his back, murmuring:

"I am not driven to beg yet."

The notary had come forward to show out the man to whom he had just given twenty-five thousand francs. It was an attention due to him. Standing between Pierre and Jean, he said in a low voice to the former, touching his elbow with his finger as he spoke:

"Come, monsieur, be generous."

"If he had been the heir," replied Pierre, in the same tone, "he wouldn't have given me a five franc piece. He told me so."

The notary, rather surprised at this, turned to Jean. Pierre found the coast clear; he took advantage of it, and got into the outer office, which he crossed with a heavy step. It seemed as if he wanted to make his precious money add to his importance.

"Ah, monsieur!" sighed the upholsterer, "why did you make me come here? I was wretched enough without that!"

"I will make him do what he ought," replied Maître Boisselot, kindly. "We must let this first fit of intoxication pass off. Come and see me in a few days."

Jean gave a sickly smile, moving his mouth as if he feared it would stiffen.

"In a few days, monsieur; but how about to-morrow?"

The notary was much moved, but he was still a notary.

"You see," he said, "I have done what I could. . . . Go after him. . . . Perhaps he would not do it because I was present. . . . He is not a bad man."

Jean had a strong wish to answer, "Nor am I."

Is not that protest the last refuge of the unfortunate when Fate has gone against them?

He left the inner office, and steadied his steps in crossing the outer one.

Pierre, who had reached the street, was not waiting for him, but did not want to have the look of running away. Besides, a man who has twenty-five thousand francs in bank-notes about him ought to walk solemnly, like one who bears the relics in a procession. He might be mistaken for a thief if he hurried on too rapidly; besides, he ran the more risk of losing his treasure.

Jean had soon rejoined him.

What passed between them?

Maitre Boisselot was a man, after all; he had proved himself to be so already by his kind feeling. He remembered a time when he had been nothing more than the son of a country sheriff's officer, but had been ambitious to rise in the world. He had then counted, with a heart that beat as strongly as a lover's, on a legacy from an uncle that would open to him the way to marry a lady with a large fortune, and give him the means to purchase the business of a notary. Consequently, he understood, from what he had then felt, the bitterness of the disappointment of missing an expected legacy.

So he thought himself obliged to show Jean Mortier also to the street-door of the office, and when the door was closed he looked after him through a window whose curtain he drew aside.

The poor fellow, after stopping a moment to rid himself either of an exclamation of distress or a curse on his ill-luck, set off after his cousin.

The chief clerk sometimes permitted himself to aspire to play the part of his master's confidant. He now came and stood beside him, holding up subserviently the little muslin curtain that the notary had let fall over the glass, and looking also at Jean Mortier.

The two cousins had stopped about twenty yards from the office, and were talking together.

"There is no chance that the peasant will give him, or even lend him, so much as twenty francs," said the chief clerk, as he watched them.

The notary thought that, for a matter of twenty francs, he might have infringed the law which forbids servants of the Government to lend money, but which does not forbid them to give it away.

Jean was speaking with animation. It was evident that he was pleading with his cousin. He clasped his hands.

Pierre seemed to listen to him impatiently. They saw him make

a quick movement to shake off his cousin, who had imprudently tapped him gently on the breast in the neighborhood of the heart, and also in the neighborhood of the pocket-book. He pushed him back so roughly that he made the poor upholsterer reel.

Jean Mortier put both hands to his head, staggered, turned round, shook his fist either at his cousin or at Heaven, and then set off to follow Pierre Mortier, who was hurrying away.

It was near the close of the month of March. A fog from the Seine was coming up along the streets. Pierre and Jean grew indistinct, then disappeared in the dim, gray atmosphere.

Maitre Boisselot drew back from the window, thoughtful and sad.

The chief clerk, thinking he could read his master's thoughts, said, in a low voice:

"Since he would neither give nor lend anything to his cousin, Pierre Mortier would have done better not to carry away on his person those twenty-five thousand francs."

The notary started and said, quickly:

"What are you thinking of?"

"Well, that if something should happen to one or other of them this evening, I should not be surprised."

"You are mad!"

"Oh! the poor fellow yonder is much nearer going mad than I am!"

"What makes you imagine. . . ?"

"I heard all their conversation while they were waiting for you."

The clerk then related to his principal all that had passed between the two cousins—the talk that began in the office and that ended in Maitre Boisselot's private room.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### A MIDNIGHT SUPPER.

AT midnight Pierre Mortier was coming out of the theatre of the *Varitès*, only partially satisfied with the operetta he had heard, though he had been at any rate well pleased to find his precious

money would procure him the satisfaction of an evening's *ennui* such as appeared to be the fashion among rich people.

He had really been unable to make anything out of the songs he heard. In his opinion, music was quite superfluous when people were discussing their domestic affairs.

But he had stretched out his legs and borne it as well as he could in an arm-chair, and the women who sang had shown him so much of the throats and the bosoms whence their warblings came forth, and they had such a fashion, *sans façon*, of showing their arms and legs, that Pierre had patiently endured the music, considering it pretty tolerable when it was listened to with eyes as well as ears.

He had made a good dinner before going to the theatre, he had been out to take refreshments between every act; and now, tired of sitting still, and with his food well digested, he was tramping along the asphalt of the Boulevard, inhaling the fresh night air at the same time as the fumes of gas, which "corrected" it, as brandy is sometimes said to "correct" pure water.

The street lamps and the lights in the *cafés* seemed all to flare in his honor, to illuminate his triumphal march through Paris.

Ah, Paris—as many a Parisian has imagined—seemed that evening built for him alone. He took possession of it in the name of the peasantry, his own order, an order that is laughed at when its members have not twenty-five thousand francs in their breeches pockets. He could pay for anything he pleased; besides, in his pocket, he had what would excite the envy of all those fellows chewing cigars, who pushed up against him as they passed him, or turned out of his way as if he were a walking garbage-heap; but he walked straight on with that jaunty gait that Parisians call *se dandinant*, from which, no doubt, proceeds the English "dandy." Pierre was fast acquiring this gait. By the use of it a consciousness of power makes itself manifest to passing eyes.

A chronicler of the imperial court relates that as soon as Bonaparte became first consul, and was installed at the Tuileries, he began to *se dandiner* in his walk, in order to look like a king.

Pierre most assuredly had never read that anecdote. It was the instinct of a conqueror which led him to imitate the Emperor Napoleon.

His gait, as he walked along the boulevard, did not in the least resemble his gait when he left the office of Maître Boisselot, still less his walk when he was going there.

He had the same thick shoes on his feet, but his uncle's bank-notes had put feathers on his heels, like Mercury's—a not inapt mythological analogy in the financial world.

As he was passing one of those great fashionable restaurants, where everything is always in preparation for a midnight meal, he slackened his pace.

His sense of smell, which had become suddenly civilized, made him conscious of delicate savors from the kitchen, unless, indeed, he smelled through his eyes, as he had heard the music, and the sight of the persons going in put him in mind that he had an appetite.

Three *grisettes* in particular crossed the sidewalk laughing, and rushed noisily into the door of the brilliant establishment.

He followed them, going behind them up a staircase softly carpeted, and reached a great hot room whose atmosphere for a moment almost suffocated him. "But, bah!" he thought, "I'll get accustomed to it, as I did to the atmosphere of the theatre." If the air became too oppressive, he knew he could correct it by smoking a pipe.

"Does monsieur want supper?" asked a waiter, who, by the cut of his whiskers and his oily manner, reminded him at once of the notary who had recently given him twenty-five thousand francs, and a piece of good advice into the bargain.

The sharp air of this waiter was magisterial and irritating, like that of Maître Boisselot.

Pierre looked him all over, like a horse-jockey, who has no idea of being taken in by the prancings and the caperings of a broken-down horse.

"Well!" he replied, "and don't they give supper in this house?"

At the same time he placed himself before a little table that was unoccupied.

The waiter, who resembled the notary, was a wit in a kind of solemn way—that kind of which the humorist Arnal was the most perfect specimen.

"Oh! certainly, monsieur, we serve supper here, but we never give supper."

He said this without the smallest laugh, but all the guests at the other two tables, between which Pierre was standing, began laughing.

The peasant comprehended in a moment; he saw the mockery, but he wore a breastplate which prevented its shafts from piercing his skin.

"Do you want part payment in advance?" he replied, with a loud laugh which sounded more silly than he expected. "Make yourself easy, waiter. I've got money to pay for what I eat, and if I pleased I could pay for all that is eaten by these gentlemen and ladies. Go and get me something, and move quicker than that. You shall have five francs *pourboire* if I am satisfied with you."

The promise of five francs was hyperbole, or an error of pronunciation; it, however, had its effect.

The laughter of the company came to an end; that is, there was no more laughter, except at the table where four elegant young men had seated themselves—men of the highest fashion in the clubs, men of different ages, but the same in dress and bearing.

As to the other table, to which as yet no supper had been brought, and before which the three young women were still standing, it became suddenly silent.

The women diminished the expression of their amusement until it dwindled to a pleasant smile. They looked at each other, and, the place seeming desirable, they sat down.

The waiter made a low bow before the peasant who had promised to pay lavishly—just as the notary had bowed low to the man who had inherited a fortune—and presented him the *carte* of the day's dishes.

Pierre, as he looked it over solemnly, without however reading it, saw out of the corners of his eyes his neighbors' little preparations for their repast.

"What does monsieur wish to order?" asked the waiter, after waiting two minutes respectfully.

"Bring me whatever you like, provided it is good."

The waiter began a rapid enumeration, in which the word *truffles* played its part, like the *Ora pro nobis* in a litany.

Pierre grew impatient; he was red as a cock, but in a good humor, and he cried out, jocosely:

"I didn't come here to eat cabbage-soup, you understand? Give me whatever those gentlemen are eating, and whatever these ladies are going to have."

This time the men's table laughed less, and a little snickering laugh arose among the ladies.

"We are as much embarrassed as you are, monsieur," said one of the three, with a voice whose tones, though decidedly vulgar, pleased Pierre Mortier.



"That's good," said a male voice.

"Well, *garçon*," said Pierre, recklessly, "you choose for these ladies and myself, only choose well; if the things are bad, I sha'n't pay for them."

"What wine does monsieur prefer?"

"What wine are those gentlemen drinking?"

"Champagne *frappé*."

"That's all right. I come from Champagne. Only, I think a deal of our wine. I don't want it *frappé*—I like it best as it is."

Pierre, quite pleased with his own repartee, sat down upon the velvet bench, not finding himself comfortable in the chair provided for him. His back was to a great looking-glass, so he missed the sight of his own red face, and its contrast with the pale faces of the men at their table, and the powdered and painted faces of the women who had just sat down.

Pierre supped like a glutton, partly because he always had a big appetite, and partly because of his inordinate vanity.

He drank, too, in proportion to what he ate, without, however, being drunk exactly. He was one of those stout casks which can keep all they will hold, and which must be filled to the brim and run over before they show any signs of having taken too much.

At every bumper he held out his glass toward the women at their table, rather in mockery than for the sake of gallantry. He knew too well what he was about, he thought, to let himself be made tipsy by *them*.

At dessert one of them rose to go and light her cigarette by the cigar of one of the four gentlemen of fashion.

The man she applied to, who had been in a brown study for some minutes, roused by her application, said, showing her his cigar which had gone out:

"My dear, you have made a mistake; I have no fire left."

"Well, then," she said, insinuatingly, "light it again and give me some."

The man with the cigar gave a sigh that was too genuine for such a scene, and, pointing to Pierre Mortier, said:

"Ask that gentleman; I dare say he carries his flint and steel with him, and, at any rate, to all appearances he has kindling."

This vulgar pleasantry, which was uttered in French slang, made both tables laugh.

Pierre did not understand the joke, but the tone in which it was said did not please him.

"As for me," continued the melancholy gentleman, "I haven't so much as a match left; I used them all up this evening—hoping they would bring me good luck. I am totally cleaned out."

Pierre did not know what "cleaned out" meant, but he, too, laughed.

"Ha! ha! cleaned out! He's cleaned out!" he repeated, emphasizing his words by a movement of his head and shoulders.

The girl lighted her cigarette by another man's cigar, came back and seated herself before Pierre Mortier,

"Well, it seems that *you* are not cleaned out, at any rate?" she said, interrogatively.

Pierre laughed louder still; not that he understood the term, but he began to guess its meaning.

"I'm all right," he said. "And you'd like to come in for a share, wouldn't you?"

The girl, who had brought this reply upon herself, but who nevertheless was angry at it, said, sharply:

"My good man, you are tipsy."

"That's not so; for I can see clear enough still."

"Is it your wife or your housekeeper who takes care of you when you get home rather *mellow*?"

"I've got no wife and I've got no housekeeper. I take care of myself."

"Ah, that's it, is it?"

"And what's more, my good girl, it's no business of yours!"

"Yes, it is, for I think we come from the same neighborhood."

"I'm quite sure we don't."

"To what butcher have you sold your beeves, that you are so well satisfied? Are you going to furnish the *bœuf gras* this year?"

"I have nothing to do with beeves or cows," responded Pierre. "You have not hit the mark."

"Then you have come into a fortune."

"Now you are right."

"A big one?"

"Ha! ha!"

"How much?"

"That, my little dear, will be entered in the law-books in the proper place."

"Well, if you go on living every day as you have done to-day, you will soon be drained dry, . . . like monsieur."

"Ah, bah ! so monsieur is drained dry, is he ?"

Pierre turned round to the gentleman in question, who frowned, bit his lips, and then said with a trembling in his voice, which he suppressed with difficulty :

"My affairs are no business of yours, my good man."

"Just as you please. . . . I was only going to offer to pay—"

"What he's lost ?" cried another gentleman at the same table, holding out his hand. "Don't hesitate ; I'll take it. You can pay me."

"No ; I only meant a drink all round."

"Ah, that wouldn't be so dear. That wouldn't cost you fifteen thousand francs."

"Fifteen thousand francs !"

As Pierre said this, he placed his hand quickly on his left side, where his heart and his pocket-book both were, and gave a great sigh—the sigh of a moneyed man well satisfied with himself, and not to be done out of his money.

He passed his finger over his mouth to wipe the corners, as if the foam on the top of his good fortune might betray him.

"Do you really owe all that ?" he asked, winking at the melancholy gentleman.

This personage, thus brought forward against his will, was a man about thirty years of age, with features regular rather than handsome, with the ordinary elegance of a man in his position—one of those men who are correctly up to the standard in appearance, deportment, and even apparent frankness, who are called *distingué* because nothing personally distinguishes them from the general crowd of men of dissipation and fashion.

He was pale. He had eaten no supper. His feverish eyes betrayed his great anxiety. Now his glance became suddenly angry, and, turning to the friend who had thus brought him forward, he said :

"Henri, I beg of you, say no more of my affairs in this place."

The man called Henri drew himself up, curled the ends of his mustache, and said :

"Our affairs you should say, my dear Gaston. For I am interested in the matter, as you can well understand."

"Are you afraid I shall not pay you?"

"No—not precisely."

"Well, then, give up this joking."

"I would like you to understand, Gaston, that it was you yourself who began it. You need not have said you were cleaned out."

"That's enough about it. Say no more."

"Ha! Gaston, are you afraid any one will tell your wife?"

Gaston made a sudden movement that showed anger and impatience, and knocked over a pretty champagne-glass.

"Henri," he said, "I forbid you to go on."

"Forbid me! Gaston, I forbid you to forbid me to do anything."

"You are presuming on your good luck . . ."

"And you on your bad luck . . ."

"You look so self-satisfied . . ."

"And you so miserable . . ."

Gaston, who had less patience than the other, or else less sharpness of repartee, made a movement as if to pick up a dessert-knife on the table.

Henri burst into a loud laugh, which made his friend ashamed of himself.

"Wouldn't you like to stick that into me, as if I were a pear or an apple? Come, *mon cher*, shake hands."

Across the table—across a basket of fruit—the two gentlemen touched hands.

Pierre Mortier could not quite make out what was passing beside him. To clear his intelligence, he drank more wine.

The sense he had of his own importance made him desirous to play the part of peace-maker. He rose, though with some difficulty, his napkin pendent, like a flag of truce, from the top button of his waistcoat, and, coming up to the table where the dispute had been going on, with a glass of champagne in his hand—

"Come, come," he said, speaking very thickly, "don't get angry with each other, my good fellows."

"What business have you to interfere?" replied Gaston, who had also risen, and who gave him a sudden push backward, sharp and nervous, full in the middle of his chest.

This unexpected blow, which made Pierre fall back upon his

seat, upset him entirely, and developed his latent tipsiness. They all thought he was going to make some rough reply, but he suddenly became maudlin.

"What business have I to interfere, . . . business have I to interfere?" he murmured. "I find everybody ungrateful to me this day."

The recollection of what had passed between him and his cousin, some hours before, now came back upon him.

"When I make any one an offer," he went on, "he refuses it. Well! more's the pity. . . . I shall give nothing. . . . And here's another fellow afraid of being scolded by his wife because he'll go home with an empty pocket. . . . O women! women!"

The gamblers sat silent. Gaston, who had grown very pale, sat looking at his plate and twirling his mustache.

The women had done their suppers. They were frightened by the suddenness of Pierre's drunkenness.

They looked at each other, and came to an understanding at once. Hoping to profit by a last gleam of sense before he sank into dead drunkenness, they deputed by a sign the boldest among them to make him a suggestion.

"Is it quite true that you will pay for us?" she asked Pierre Mortier.

The word *pay* made him start. But his good nature, sustained by his full stomach, came uppermost.

"Yes, I'll pay," he answered. "Yes, . . . I've got plenty to pay with. Have you any doubt about it?"

"Constant—bring the bill," said the girl.

Constant was a waiter of experience.

He had had the women's bill made out, and also that of Pierre Mortier. He brought them both on the same waiter.

Pierre, on receiving the two slips, screwed up his eyes, a movement that was now necessary to let him see. He held out the two papers at arm's length. His sight, as it grew worse, grew longer.

He gave a slight hiccough, which seemed to interfere with a grimace.

"You dog! Butter must cost dear in these parts," he growled.

But that was all. Pierre had a dread of getting angry. He felt that he was being looked at. He put his hand with great dignity into his waistcoat-pocket, and drew out a purse full of gold. But

gold it was always best to keep. Pierre thought more of it than he did of paper.

He therefore pulled out his pocket-book, opened it, and spread out his roll of bank-notes in order to choose the dirtiest of them.

This display produced a murmur of astonishment, and also of admiration.

"Banco!" cried one of the gamblers.

Pierre picked up his roll of notes, excepting the one to pay with, and for which he expected change, and stuffed it back into his pocket.

A silence, as profound as a silence for devotion, followed a blasphemy which escaped from one of those present.

A man so well provided could not but inspire respect, to say nothing of compassion.

Pierre was in that obscure first stage of drunkenness when it is an effort, to pull one's self together before making up one's mind how to act.

He nodded his head. He had but one idea at present in his mind. He knew that he was expecting some change, and that he must not move until he got it.

While he was waiting, the gentlemen from the club had settled their account and were making ready to go.

Gaston, who was out of temper, and who could not pay his share, because he really was cleaned out to his last cent, walked first toward the door.

Henri, the lucky winner, who paid for the whole party, called him back.

"Hi! Monterey, you are forgetting your cane."

So saying, he held out to him a very pretty little walking-stick.

Gaston de Monterey turned back, took his cane, which he bent, and made it whistle in the air. Then he said sarcastically to Henri:

"I'm much obliged to you for not keeping it in pledge."

"Oh! I know you think a great deal of it. . . . Are you still angry with me, Gaston?"

"No, . . . but when I win . . ."

"I am ready to give you your revenge, whenever you like."

"I shall not wait for that to pay you what I owe."

"Oh! don't put yourself out."

"Do you mean you think me hard put to it?"

"No, I don't think anything, except that we ought not to have come here to supper, that I have wounded your feelings, and that

you are in a bad humor. It is late, . . . nearly two o'clock. Madame de Monterey is going to be very angry with us . . . I have my *coupé*. Shall I drive you home?"

"No—I had rather walk. It will do me good."

They went down-stairs.

Pierre remained alone in the great room. He was quite at his ease. He would like to have stayed there and slept all night; but the waiter, when he gave him his change, told him that everybody else was gone; that they were going to put out the lights, and that he had better go home and go to bed.

"Go to bed? . . . Where can I go to bed? . . . Oh! at my hotel. . . . And where is my hotel?"

"Ah! that I can't tell you. . . . Monsieur promised me a *pour-boire*."

"Ah! you want to drink, my lad? You had better not. *Tiens!* it shall never be said that Pierre Mortier was not generous the day he inherited a fortune. There! there's something to drink with, . . . you drunkard!"

And Pierre, who could hardly keep his feet, put a ten-franc gold-piece into the waiter's hand.

This generosity made Constant anxious to be of service. He conducted him down-stairs to the outer door quite filially, and, before leaving him to himself in the darkness of the boulevard at that time of night, he completed his mission by a prudent offer.

"Will you have a carriage?"

"What nonsense! What for?"

"To take you back to your hotel."

"Well! And these legs of mine—don't you suppose they will do me that much service?"

"It would be more prudent. You have so much money about you."

"Do you suppose there are any robbers about, . . . except yourselves?"

Constant smiled. This speech weakened his purpose. He pressed the matter, however.

Pierre Mortier remembered what Gaston de Monterey had said. He said it over again, drawing himself up as he did so.

"No; I had rather walk. It will do me good."

"Just as you please," replied the waiter, who had already gone further than he was accustomed to do, being a social philosopher.

When Pierre found himself upon the asphalt pavement, in the fresh air of the night, he shivered, and for a moment was giddy. He stood a few seconds in the same spot, twisting his body round without moving his feet, trying vaguely to make out where he was, struggling unconsciously, with all the force of his will, against his drunkenness, and then, when he thought he could walk straight, he went ahead without knowing where he was going.

The maudlin feelings that had come over him toward the close of supper returned, now that he found himself alone in the fresh air.

Could the melancholy of a Parisian night have made itself perceptible to so dense a soul as his? May we apply to Pierre Mortier a saying that was one day let fall by Lamartine, "*The cabaret opens the heart*"? At any rate, it is certain that, on coming out of this *cabaret* of fashion, the heart of Pierre Mortier was open to any wind that chanced to blow.

Without knowing why, he had tears in his eyes. He wiped them away at first; then he began to wonder why they came. The logic of a drunkard is pretty sharp and often casuistic.

"Since I want to cry," he said to himself, "it must be because I am not pleased with myself."

He tried to follow up this reflection.

"True, true," he went on, with the utmost frankness, "I have been a brute; I have spent too much; I have eaten too much; I have drunk too much; . . . I have said too many silly things. . . . What an idea I must have given of myself to those gentlemen . . . and ladies!"

This last scruple did not embarrass him long.

"Bah! I don't care for any of them! They all wanted a bit of my cake. . . . I had better have given it to Jean. . . . Poor Jean! . . . I ought to have paid for his supper. . . . He wanted to take me home with him, . . . and it was I who ought to have brought him here."

Had he had this vision of an unasked guest while eating his supper, . . . and had he put it from him? He remembered, all of a sudden, the heart-broken look of his poor cousin when he parted from him. If he had drunk so much and had tried so hard to amuse himself, he thought it was that he might forget that last look of his cousin's. The sad eyes of Jean Mortier had seemed to look at him all through that evening. He had seen them glancing at him through a little hole in the curtain at the theatre—the Variétés; he



had seen them again in the face of that "cleaned-out" card-player; he was afraid of seeing them under the brims of the hats that passed him by, or the dark forms that crossed and recrossed him, picking up cigar-stumps on the pavements.

He thought of a scene of sorrow passing at Boulogne while he was at supper—how his cousin had gone home and told his wife that he had had no legacy, that he ought to have had one, but that Pierre had got it all. And the little girl, could she have understood? May be she, too, had began to cry.

"I dare say they are all crying now," said Pierre, wiping away a tear, "and I am the cause of it. I'm a fool and a miserable beggar. . . . It always brings bad luck when a man is selfish. . . . And then why-shouldn't I set up a family, now that I have the means to support one? A ready-made family. Poor Jean! It seems as if his wife were really fond of him. . . . She isn't one of those women who eat everything up. . . . The money I spent on those greedy girls to-night would have kept Jean and his wife and his little girl for a week. . . . I was wrong, awhile ago, to refuse to give him anything. It wouldn't have ruined me. . . . The notary will think badly of me. If he can do me an ill turn in drawing up the deeds, he will do it to a certainty. . . . I'll go and see him to-morrow. That's it! I will make just a little present to the child."

He walked on some time without stopping, hoping that if he did not pause he would escape making more uncomfortable reflections.

He deceived himself; his bodily activity made his mental activity greater. He wanted to smoke. His poor pipe! He seemed to have despised it since he became rich. That was bad.

In searching into the deep pocket, where he had imbedded his heritage, he felt a paper which he pulled out.

He was afraid it might be a bank-note. It would have been awful had he lighted his pipe with a bank-note.

But, looking at it under the gas, he recognized the envelope his cousin had given him at the notary's.

Good luck makes people superstitious, more even than misfortune; above all, when the drunkenness of possession is augmented by physical drunkenness.

Pierre saw in the fact of the possession of this envelope a warning from Heaven—a lesson. He was not a man to receive a lesson from Heaven with indifference, any more than a lesson from a notary; and, even as he wanted to go back and set himself right

with Maître Boisselot, he wanted forthwith to make things straight with Providence.

He drew heroically out of his pocket-book two bank-notes, each for one thousand francs, made sure that that was their exact value and no more, and that he had only taken two, then he slipped them into the envelope, saying to himself :

"Won't he be glad to-morrow morning, when he gets this letter !"

Ought he to prepay it ? Of course, he ought.

He saw the red lamp of a tobacconist's establishment, which was not yet shut up for the night. He went in and asked for a postage-stamp, and, as Providence seemed to him to be doing many things to promote this good deed that night, it seemed to him providential that there was a letter-box just before the tobacconist's door.

He felt really comforted when he heard the heavy envelope drop down in the box.

Now he could go to bed. He would have pleasant dreams.

But suppose his letter, in spite of its being prepaid, should never reach its address ?

Such things sometimes happen. There are in the service of the post-office beggars who do not every day get such dinners as the one he had that day eaten, and who would be very glad if they could dine that way—suppose one of them should steal his two thousand francs ?

"I should have done better," he thought, "to have sent it to-morrow by a messenger."

Anyhow if the letter arrived on time, he was sorry now that he should miss seeing Jean's face when he received it. It would have been a triumph and a pleasure to witness the joy of the man and his wife and their little one.

To witness ?—yes, but to go and tell them it was coming would be better still. What a delight it would be !

Pierre, since he had resolved on doing a good action, wanted to have its rewards before they were due. His tender-heartedness had made a great change in him. His tears were a sort of dew on his broad smile. The effervescence left in his mind by the supper had turned to gayety. To the desire of doing a benevolent thing was added the desire of playing a good joke, and what better fun could there be than arriving very early in the morning at Boulogne, and knocking tap, tap, tap, at the door if there were no bell ; in singing

out, in shouting, in calling up Jean and his wife and the little girl, provided they should be asleep, among the furniture that the sheriff's officer was to seize and sell that day!

What an awakening! what a surprise! The neighbors, of course, would run in and witness the spectacle; and all through Boulogne it would be known in no time that Pierre Mortier was neither a curmudgeon nor an unkind kinsman; that of his own free-will he had given a share of his heritage to his cousin without being forced to do so.

Boulogne is so near Paris that, probably, Paris would hear of it too.

That notary who had taken it upon himself to give him good advice, how vexed he would be to find out that of himself, and not by reason of anything that *he* had said, Pierre had gone and hunted up Jean!

He did not feel tired. He would go on foot. Anyhow, if he got tired he could afford to hire a carriage. He saw some still on a stand, and met some along the boulevards.

It is true that at two o'clock in the morning they would probably cost dear, and it would be better to save the fare.

Pierre did not exactly remember the name of the street or the number of the house, but what matter; he could find it. It seemed to him that, after carrying an address several hours in one's pocket, one must in some way be able to remember it.

So his mind was made up. He did not intend to change it. It might be three miles or it might be six, but who cared for Parisian miles? He had walked plenty of miles in his day to gain a few five-franc pieces on nights after markets, and after lingering in *cabarets* where the wine was abominable.

He took his bearings, but for more certainty he went up to a man whom he had noticed near him several times that evening, and who anyhow was going in the same direction, and asked him the shortest way to get to the village of Boulogne.

"Through the Bois after you pass the Champs-Élysées," replied the stranger.

Pierre started a little at the sound of his voice. He fancied that he remembered having heard it before. It was, however, but a passing fancy. He bowed, for, having become kindly, he was also disposed to be polite.

The stranger, whose hands were in the side-pockets of his over-

coat, with the collar well up around his face, and a cane sticking straight up out of one of the pockets, judged it needless to respond to the bow—to take his hands out for so small a thing. He crossed the street and walked along the other sidewalk the same way Pierre was going, till he reached the top of the Place de la Concorde. Then he took a carriage, which seemed to be taking him up the Champs-Élysées.

Probably he lived in that direction.

Pierre had lighted his pipe. All that remained now of his copious supper and his abundant libations was a sort of vaporous feeling about his temples, a beating in his head, which by degrees grew less and less, and an instinct of walking on at a quick pace toward his destination.

He went on and on, without fatigue, happy to live, happy to be rich, happy because he was on his way to make others happy.

The only thing he regretted was having wasted a sous on a postage-stamp, in order to carry his two thousand francs. Since he would get there before his letter, it would have been so much better to save postage !

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## CHAPTER IV.

### PORTRAIT OF A LADY.

ALL that evening and all that night a woman lay awake, hearing the clocks strike every hour, listening to the carriages as they passed down the street, growing more and more frightened as her husband did not return, not remembering or not willing to remember that it was pretty much the same thing every evening and every night, and that for several months Gaston de Monterey had seldom come home before dawn.

For it was he who was so anxiously expected.

By-and-by we shall know whether Jean Mortier's wife slept better than the wife of the fast man and gambler.

Madame Gabrielle de Monterey is thirty. She was always pretty, but sorrow has made her beautiful.

A touch of melancholy about her face gives it a grace which

will always abide with her. Her blue eyes, that her anxiety has made misty and more soft, have a penetrating gentleness; and her mouth, which has an habitual expression of tender irony, uncomplaining resignation, quiet courage and sympathy, makes every one respect the secrets that her lips will not unfold.

She is neither a blonde nor a brunette, though rather fair than dark. If character could be described by color, one might say that hers seemed something between the two. It was energetic without violence; it could be submissive, but it was also firm.

Tall, well made, never but once having lost for a time that perfection of outline endangered by maternity, she has grown slender since she weaned her son. Gabrielle seems much younger than her husband, though there is really only a difference between them of four years.

She was his cousin. Her guardian had been her uncle, Gaston's father.

Though old Monsieur de Monterey had promoted his ward's marriage with his son, it was not because it was a good match, though Gabrielle's fortune was much larger than that of her cousin, but the guardian, being a man of sense and observation, had judged rightly of the character of Gabrielle, and had also perceived her growing affection for his son.

Monsieur de Monterey did not deceive himself as to Gaston. He may, however, have been mistaken as to the amount of influence likely to be exercised over him by his fair cousin. Because he had early sown in her the virtues that in Gaston always withered, and had seen in her their increase, he fancied she would have more influence over his son than he.

He had plenty of early misdemeanors to overlook in Gaston—faults and follies for which the boy's pretty ways always served as an excuse, and which long seemed mere boyish pranks to his old father; but, when these things continued to go on after Gaston was twenty, they exceedingly disquieted him.

Monsieur de Monterey was old, and a widower. This son was the fruit of a late marriage. His mother had died in giving him birth.

Was it the enfeebled sap derived from too feeble a father, that, growing still more feeble in his son's veins, was responsible for Gaston's little strength in keeping good resolutions, for his facility in giving ear to temptations, for his utter indifference to serious things, for his lax notions of morality?

He was thought to be kind-hearted, because he was never brutal. And yet he could fall into violent passions, and the doctors, when he was a child, had often been afraid of the effects of his frenzies of kicking and biting.

One day, while in company with his cousin, she had asked him (with some little mockery about his amusing himself like a girl) for a doll of hers with which he was playing. At this he became very angry, and flung the doll at her head so violently that he made a gaping wound on her temple. The scar could still be seen. Gabrielle raised her finger to it sometimes with a sigh, and had done so often during the last three years.

Had love entered through that little wound ?

Possibly. Not that the orphaned Gabrielle was one of those women whom it is said are won by ill-treatment, but she was one of those born with a maternal instinct, who end by becoming mothers in a great degree to their lovers or their husbands.

As soon as she began to understand that her cousin would always need to be watched over by some one wholly devoted to the task, she began to love him dearly.

Even before her uncle, upon his death-bed, implored her to marry this, his grown-up child, this playmate of her childhood, she had begun to take a mother's care of one who was more an orphan than herself.

And Gaston loved his cousin. But he loved her most because he always had loved her, because he was weak, because he had an instinct to lean on something stronger than himself, and because he loved ease and luxury ; in short, because he felt that he gained in every way by having a beautiful, elegant, young wife whom every one must envy him.

The first two years, especially the first year of their marriage, were very happy. Gaston thought he had gained a prize ; and she, who had thought she would be called on for some sacrifices, was almost ashamed of being so very happy.

Before her boy was born she used to have long day-dreams, and when thinking of the little one, who ought some day to respect and to esteem his father, she thought it might be well to rouse in Gaston some manly ambition. But she found it impossible.

Gaston did not understand, and would not be made to understand, ambition. It was no use to him. He knew he was rich. He had no need of government employment to earn a livelihood. He

hated speculation; as to politics, politics were all very well for lawyers. He hadn't any political opinions at all.

Because of the little *de*, that sign of noble birth, that once upon a time had got itself affixed to the name of Monterey, he thought himself under an obligation to have slightly legitimist tendencies, which, however, did not prevent his having intimate associates among men who hovered like butterflies round the imperial court, or going sometimes out hunting with very confidential friends of the Orleanist princes, in the forests belonging to the family.

His indifference either made him very proud, or enabled him to make a mock of enthusiastic people.

Gabrielle's maternal prospects, which made her so happy, and to which she looked forward as likely to unite her still more closely with her husband, led, on the contrary, to his indulging himself in his first absences from home.

Gabrielle, feeling herself sick, cherishing, indeed, all her sufferings from such a cause, but not liking to worry Gaston by her indisposition, urged him to go out and enjoy himself.

Mother-like, she fixed an hour when she hoped for his return. She generally, indeed, prescribed his outgoings and incomings. When he came home, she expected to be told all about his visits and his amusements; and he, like a petted boy who loves his mother's compliments, and even courts her scoldings, since they are sure to be followed by pleasant pardons, would tell her everything—or nearly everything—taking pleasure every time in having some little infraction of the programme to relate.

Gabrielle would cry "Fie!" and pardon him at once, lest displeasure should enlarge the rift between them.

After her boy was born, it was impossible for the young mother, who nursed her little baby, to keep the big one with her as much as she had done before, to find out daily what he did, to know exactly all that had interested or occupied him, to watch his looks, and to see if he were telling truth or falsehood.

Gaston, like other lazy men who want to spare themselves the trouble of close reasoning and the bother of being truthful when it costs an effort, told fibs on all occasions for no particular reason, from no necessity, with no bad intention, but just from a habit of lying, as people in a *tête-à-tête* gape sometimes when making ready an answer, so as to give themselves full command of their faculties.

Gabrielle suspected this defect; but she became fully aware of it during the first weeks after Roger's birth.

The curtains of her bedchamber were always closed when she asked Gaston her usual questions, so as to soften the light and keep it from shining too brightly on the cradle. She could not look her husband so often in the face; her attention was distracted by a little cry which made her break off her string of questions, to nurse and tend *the other one*, and she would put off finding out what the big baby had been doing till the morrow.

Of course, Gaston had to have another chamber. The mother who was nursing needed the whole room. Besides, Gaston would by no means have put up with being kept awake at hours when wakefulness made the mother proud. So he had thenceforward his own chamber, very pretty and convenient. Indeed, he had a suite of rooms, bedroom, sitting-room, and dressing-room, in the little detached house they occupied, *entre cour et jardin*, in the Rue d'Anjou Saint-Honoré.

One night, after she had nursed her baby for ten months, Gabrielle, somewhat disquieted by her little boy's coughing, went to Gaston's chamber to bring him back with her to look at the baby in his cradle, and decide whether she had not better send for the doctor; she was astonished to find the chamber empty, and that her husband had not come in.

It was a terrible shock, and it had even a physical influence upon her. She waited till four in the morning, leaving the door open between her own room and her husband's; running about in her night-dress from the cradle to a window that looked into the court-yard; distracted, not by common, vulgar jealousy, but by a vague, many-sided anxiety; fearing, not for her husband's conjugal fidelity, but dreading the self-assertion of a weak spirit taking flight without open revolt.

At four o'clock in the morning Gaston came in, a little intoxicated by his own gayety. He had spent the night at his club. He had played cards; he had won; he had been to supper. He told the truth. He was rather proud of it. He knelt down before his wife, amazed to find her up and in his chamber. He was as charming as a child, as loving as a lover. He wanted to persuade his darling Gabrielle that she had not, never could have, any rival but the queen of clubs.

Gabrielle, from the cause we have indicated, was beginning to



be ill, and to have a high fever. She was afraid of one of those attacks which make nursing mothers crazy. She dared not allow herself to be ill. She constrained herself to keep calm, and told her husband that she had been chiefly frightened lest he should have met with some accident at night in the streets. She forgave him at once for playing truant, only she was astonished to learn that he was a member of any club (a thing which she had always opposed); she scolded him for form's sake; told him the baby had been sick, but hastened to add that she was sure there was not much the matter; would not listen to all the fine promises he was ready to offer her, but, begging him to make haste to go to bed, and make up his lost sleep, went back into her own room shivering, where she could weep in solitude.

Though the baby had a cold, the doctor, who came next morning, thought it best to wean him, his mother being no longer well enough to nurse him, unless, indeed, she preferred to engage a wet-nurse.

Gabrielle felt that she should be frightfully jealous of any such person. She was afraid, too, that it might make her angry with her husband, who had been its cause. So, as little Roger was a healthy baby, and the doctor assured her that to wean him would be quite safe, she did so.

She was seriously ill for three days. Gaston did not go out of the house during that time. It was the greatest proof of attachment that could be expected from him.

Impatience to see her baby, who had been installed in a room at some distance from her own, made Gabrielle resist the temptation of prolonging a convalescence which gave her back her husband. At the end of three days she constrained herself to get up again. Her fever broke the next day, and life recommenced, but with a wound. Gaston had no idea that he had had anything to do with her illness. When he saw his wife looking a little pale, but smiling, and the baby's cradle carried back into her chamber, he went out and ordered a quantity of flowers, to fill up all the vases in the *salon*.

But, as soon as he began to go out again by day, he went out also at night, and, a week later, Gabrielle was certain he had gone back to the club, and that he probably was playing high.

She tried scolding him, and he was cross. She tried being coquettish and charming, but she would not sacrifice Roger even for him. For a month she led the life of a woman of fashion; she took

her husband out with her into the gay world, but it bored him so horribly, and visits of politeness were so often the occasion of his being the reverse of polite, that Madame de Monterey gave up that plan of amusing him.

Above all things she felt that his indolent nature must not be pushed to extremity. She must carefully retain in Gaston's heart the place that as his little cousin she had held from infancy; he had grown used to her. She might lose him if she wearied him.

"Suppose he ceased to love me," she said to herself, "all would be over!"

Had he ever loved her? Yes, as much as he now loved his son, but less, most certainly, than he loved himself.

Gaston was one of those unconscious egotists who fancy they are making great sacrifices for other people when they are not obnoxious to them by their passions or worrying them to their own advantage.

Because he stole away from Gabrielle to play cards at the club; because he told her fibs as often as possible; because, though given up to a life of dissipation, it was the dissipation only of the card-table and the restaurant; because he did not forsake his wife for other women—he fancied that he loved her!

When, sometimes, some inevitable explanation brought him in conflict with Gabrielle's gentle remonstrances, he always thought it an irresistible and victorious argument to be able to say:

"Well, hadn't you rather I should lose a little money at cards than to ruin myself by going after other women?"

Gabrielle took good care not to point out to him that it was no more necessary for a man to frequent a club than to spend his time behind the scenes at the opera or in ladies' boudoirs. She never made any reply to this argument, and appeared to agree with him.

Gaston was a reckless card-player, and nearly always unlucky.

Gabrielle knew that he was going to ruin. But, if she trembled at the prospect, it was not because of the material loss. She was afraid that, when he had lost all his fortune, not daring to lay his hand on that of his wife, or rather not being able to do so, he might have recourse to disgraceful expedients.

Monsieur de Monterey, when he married his son to his rich ward, had insisted on her money being settled on herself. This apparently was from delicacy, but in reality, with the full consent of Gabrielle, as a precaution.

Thus, if Gaston ruined himself, he would not ruin his wife. He had accepted this arrangement, which was prompted by his father's mistrust, without thinking much about it. And even later, when he came to think over it, he came to the conclusion that it was better for him.

Only, the more he impaired his own capital, the more it provoked him not to be able to touch that of Gabrielle. His deceptions became more frequent, his lies greater. He used to fancy he could hide the embarrassments that became more pressing every day by borrowings and having notes discounted, which ran him more deeply into debt, instead of getting him out of it.

Gabrielle had a secret counselor. An old friend of her father-in-law and guardian, a sharer in her anxieties, a sort of lay-confessor, who did not learn all about her from herself, but who kept her informed of the financial escapades of her husband.

One clause in the marriage contract permitted Gabrielle to dispose, in the event of very pressing circumstances, of a large sum of money, which in that case was to be placed in her own hands.

Gaston had forgotten this or did not know it. He had listened so carelessly to all that lawyer's jargon!

Gabrielle, always on the watch for a crisis which would jeopardize the honor of her husband, was holding back to save him when it came, and whenever she heard of some new disaster, would ask anxiously:

"Has the time come?"

She knew that she must choose it judiciously, for, after the money in her own power was gone, it would be all over for her, and for him; his creditors must then do their worst, and honor would be sacrificed. She could do nothing further. And if Gaston, excited by this help, plunged back into the gulf from which he had been rescued, he would go down, to rise no more. Gabrielle would then have the misery of not being able to save him, and would reproach herself for having helped him to accomplish his ruin.

Such, for more than six years, had been the life of Madame Gaston de Monterey. Gabrielle had been married about eight years.

Roger did not console her; nothing can console those who have the instincts of a mother when one of their sons goes wrong. A great joy can not be set off against a great disappointment. It may exist indeed as chronic sorrow, but the sorrow will run side by side

with the happiness. The heart will bleed on one side, and gain strength and courage on the other.

The mother devoted herself to the education of her son. She was one of those intrepid teachers who for love of their children would learn Latin and Greek—as yet she was only beginning to buy grammars. Roger was seven; he was intelligent. He learned much that no masters can teach unless before or behind their instructions lies the influence of a loving intelligence which prepares the memory by tender associations, makes it take in an idea, and retain it by the reward of a caress. Children must love in order to learn, and teachers must love in order to teach children.

Roger loved his mother, which was but natural, but he loved her with a passion extraordinary at his age, as if he had divined—presaged—that some day he would be her consolation and defender.

Mothers often let fall tears, that they fancy that they shed in secret, on the pillows of their little children. They fall like dew upon the baby's head, and the baby sleeps on, or the mother thinks it sleeps, while they are falling.

Has not many an unhappy woman, rich and poor, been surprised, during a long, sad night of watching, by a mute, earnest, questioning look from the cradle, which seemed to ask her why she shed those tears?

How often has a betrayed, abandoned wife—an ill-treated mother—wiped her eyes quietly and said to herself:

“Dear little baby! . . . if he could only understand! . . . But happily he can't!” Of course he can't, but he can see, and the impression that his mother is unhappy will come to him later, and some day, when she is not weeping, will revive this memory of the time when she wept over him because she thought he could not understand.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE PRODIGAL HUSBAND.

GABRIELLE DE MONTEREY was watching for her husband on this March night as she had watched and waited for him many times before.

For some weeks past she had been more anxious than ever. Gaston had been more nervous and irritable. His indolence, which used to trouble her, had given place to a sort of fitful energy which showed itself in his walk, in his gestures, and in his speech, but which promised to lead to nothing, as it had evidently no end in view.

Madame de Monterey made believe to be anxious about the health of her husband. Perhaps, if he saw a doctor, he might own the cause.

But for the first time in his life the man of ease, who generally was scared at any trifle, who looked on the least feverish attack as a catastrophe, and above all as a sign of bad luck, laughed nervously at his wife's anxieties, and assured her that he enjoyed the best of health.

Gabrielle held counsel frequently with her old friend Monsieur Henrion. He had promised to come back the next morning and bring her more complete and precise information as to Gaston's last debts and last doings.

Had the moment for sacrificing her money, long looked for, come at last?

The night passed, and Gaston had not come home. Gabrielle, shivering with cold and apprehension, was obliged to lie down in her bed to deceive her chambermaid and also her little son.

The child woke early, and, every morning as soon as he was dressed, ran into his mother's room to kiss her (it was a sort of completion to his prayers). There he would sit and chatter, telling her all that he was going to do during the day—all the great things, as to amusement, and all the lesser ones, as to his studies.

Gabrielle kept him with her an hour or two, generally to leave Monsieur de Monterey time for his morning's nap before the visit—less familiar and more respectful—that his son always paid him.

That morning Gabrielle resolved to keep Roger till breakfast-time, that he might not suspect that his father had not been home all night.

The poor woman, with her head upon her pillow and her hands (which her boy seized and kissed as he ran in) stretched out of bed, weary for want of sleep, more weary of life, and hiding the tears in her sweet eyes, which would have astonished her little boy, was saying to herself: "Where can he be? There is no club open at this

hour—not even a restaurant. Where can he have gone to spend the night?”

She dared not believe herself deserted for any other woman; such an idea would have taken all strength away from her.

It was not only that, as a proud woman and a modest wife, she would have dreaded infidelity on the part of her husband, but if, gambler as he was, he ever fell into the power of some degraded creature—if, obeying her as her slave, he emancipated himself from the obligation of returning to his own home—if he gave himself a pretext for entertaining his club associates elsewhere—he would be hopelessly ruined. Gabrielle would have no more opportunities of seeing him, of scolding him, or of bringing him under his little boy's influence, so as to lead him back to the fireside he so recklessly deserted.

All the time, while smiling at Roger, who was chattering to her gayly, though she heard no word of what he was saying, she was thinking:

“All is lost! Where is he? When will he come back? If he does not come back, where shall I go to look for him?”

The fear of an accident or of suicide no longer haunted her. She was accustomed to know that he was abroad in the streets of Paris, coming home to his bed at an hour when work-people are going to their factories. At that hour the worthy and industrious are a protection to the idle and good-for-nothing.

As to the supposition that Gaston might suddenly have been seized by remorse and have tried to kill himself, Gabrielle knew too well by this time how ease-loving and self-confident was her husband's nature, to suppose he would have had resolution enough for such an act, or could have been brought to such despair.

He was one of those men who would go on confidently to the very edge of a precipice, believing he always had it in his power to return; who ruin themselves in hopes to propitiate Fortune, always under the illusion that she is going to smile upon them, and who are capable of doing anything wrong, because they imagine that their schemes of innocence for to-morrow will make up for some culpable necessity that their weakness compels them to pass through to-day.

Gabrielle said, likewise:

“If he does not come home, it will be because he is afraid to face me!”

This anxiety, this fear of having terribly much to forgive or to blame, did not quench Gabrielle's love for her husband, but it wounded her most deeply.

As I have said, Gabrielle's nature was maternal, and mothers' love is obstinate, and carries women, sometimes, to such a heroism of tenderness, that people speak of it as humiliating, while it is really heroic hope that endures unto the end.

Moralists who lay down formulas and dogmas may pretend that contempt kills love. Nothing kills love when love is real. It is even nourished, in some cases, by contempt, as it is in others by esteem.

Gabrielle had married Gaston, knowing him to be weak and inclined to dissipation. She had loved him, not for that, of course, but because she hoped, by marriage, to acquire the right to strengthen the good in him and to control the evil; and it was not when the trial seemed terrible, when the day of battle came, that she was going to desert him, to leave him, or to forget to love him. That, indeed, would be base; that would be a poor way of giving him courage, of watching over him, and of saving him, if he could yet be saved.

She loved him still, and she would always love him; she loved him more than ever, detesting the vices which drew him away from wife and son, and she waited his return with fresh heroic resolves to draw him away, by all possible inducements, from that fatal attraction to the gaming-table which poisoned his existence.

About half-past nine in the morning, Gabrielle, who, by all sorts of petting, had kept Roger in her room, as one clings to the last spar of a wrecked vessel, was told that Monsieur Henrion wanted to see her.

It must be something very pressing and important that brought her counselor to her house so early in the morning.

She sent her son away, but forbade him to go to his papa's room, as he was not well, she said, that morning, and must not be disturbed; then, dressing herself in haste, and putting on her wrapper, she hastened to the *salon*.

Shall I describe Monsieur Henrion?

I own to believing in the fatalism of physiognomies, and that all confidants, counselors, and confessors look very much alike. They all bend their brows when a case of conscience is laid before them; they all listen with unmoved faces, as if Justice and Impartiality

must wait upon their words ; they all have a little smile, half-mocking, half-complaisant, which promises indulgence to the victim who has placed himself in their hands, and sharp severity, on the other hand, to the evil-doer.

Monsieur Henrion was, furthermore, a man who wore a white cravat from the time he got up in the morning. He had a face as placid as a judge ; but his looks were interrogative rather than acceptive. He was corpulent, well dressed, a man in easy circumstances, well satisfied with his official position, confident of being held in esteem, and at peace with his own conscience. He was more than sixty, but might have passed for younger had he pleased. With a little care and pains, he might have been taken for fifty ; but probably his aim was to make people think his dress and his manners were rather an affectation of maturity, and to have them protest against his making himself look too old.

He wore a broad-brimmed hat, such as certain doctors wear in order to look like priests from the country.

He kissed Madame de Monterey's hand. And when she asked, "Well, my old friend, what is it now ?" he answered :

"There is to be an execution in this house to-day if two overdue notes for a thousand francs each are not paid immediately."

"For such a little sum as that ? How does that happen ?"

"Your husband has made arrangements for receiving without your knowledge the man who holds the notes, the sheriff's officer, and all the rest."

"Two thousand francs ! Has it come to that ? We must pay it, Monsieur Henrion ?"

"Of course. But that is not all. I have reason to think that there are other notes overdue, and yesterday evening—"

"Ah ! have you seen him ?"

"No. But I know that he lost at the club a sum that he has no means of paying, and that kind of debt can not be put off, as you know."

"How do you know all this ?"

"I have people at that place who keep me well informed—fast men, half converted, who denounce their friends as a guarantee of their own repentance, so that they may induce me the more readily to lend them money."

"And you say that he lost much ?"

"Fifteen thousand francs !"



"We must pay it, Monsieur Henrion. We must pay it at once."

"Yes. But how long do you think we can keep on paying?"

"We will pay as long as we can."

"And then—?"

"Then? Ah! how you always doubt! . . . I assure you that for some time past I have had hopes. . . . He is weary of this existence. He is getting afraid of me. . . . I can give you proof. He did not come home last night at all!"

"Do you call that a proof of repentance?"

"It is a proof that he feels ashamed of himself—a proof of remorse!"

"What! has he never come home? Why, before one o'clock he left the club. . . . To be sure, he may have gone back there after supper. Ah! if I were only prefect of police!"

"I dare say you will be some day. You are so excellent at keeping your eye on people. . . . Did you say he had been to supper? Where? After supper he may have taken a little walk till daylight. . . . And now, I dare say, he has gone somewhere to breakfast. . . . Do you think anything could have happened to him? Any accident?"

She said this without seeming alarmed. It was a kind of concession to Monsieur Henrion to disarm him, to worry him, for he was given to pessimism, but she did not really think herself that Gaston had been in any peril.

Monsieur Henrion, therefore, had not much difficulty in reassuring her. Their interview lasted about an hour.

Between half-past ten and eleven, as Gabrielle's old friend was getting up to go, the door of the *salon* opened and Gaston de Monterey came in.

At the first glance, Gabrielle felt sure he had not been to bed, and that the queen of clubs had been alone responsible for his night of debauch.

Women who love never go wrong in such impressions.

The disorder of his toilet (set straight in an antechamber, not in a boudoir), his ungloved hands, which still showed traces of having been rubbed for hours against the green cloth of the gambling-table, his boots, whose soles showed signs of a long walk, all attested that no woman was to blame for his absence. But what had he done? Where did he come from? Was he going from this time forth to play all night into next morning?

Gabrielle gave a sigh, half of relief after the emotion she had undergone, half for dread of the new anxiety that, from the disordered look and late arrival of her husband, she felt to be at hand.

Gaston had an unusual freedom in his step, his eyes sparkled, he carried his head high—so high that it was something more than natural pride of bearing.

Gabrielle, looking attentively at him for the second time, asked herself if it could be the excitement of play only which had put those changeful sparkles into her husband's eyes.

He closed his mouth tightly to keep up a fixed smile. He walked straight, with a sort of rhythm to his steps. On entering and seeing Monsieur Henrion *tête-à-tête* with his wife, he burst into a loud laugh, and came forward, holding his hat in one hand, while with the other he put back his hair, which was a little out of order.

"Ha! ha! my enemy," he cried; "have you begun the campaign early? I dare say you are here to denounce me—are not you?"

Monsieur Henrion, much surprised, before he answered, looked at Madame de Monterey. How ought he, Gaston's father's old friend, to take this way of addressing him, with jokes that were almost impertinent, and certainly disagreeable? He very seldom met Gaston. Their relations were generally cold, stiff, and ceremonious. It was the first time the man of fashion had ever failed to treat him with respect, or had ever exaggerated his mistrust of him into out-and-out mockery.

"Monsieur, I am not your enemy," he said at last, with a gravity that was intended to convey a lesson, "for I was the friend of your father, and Madame de Monterey permits me to be her friend still."

"Oh! I was only joking when I said that, my dear Monsieur Henrion. You are quite right to be fond of us. One never has too many true friends, . . . myself especially. I haven't any friends, . . . only people who play cards with me . . . and creditors."

He gave a long laugh, not called for by any great wit in his words, nor by the situation.

"What can it be?" thought Gabrielle. "He is so gay, I am sure he must be hiding some great trouble."

"He is mad or drunk," thought Monsieur Henrion.

"I bet now," said Gaston, flinging himself into an easy-chair, and stretching out his legs, "that you have been getting hold of one of my tailor's bills. . . . Ah! you keep a sharp eye upon me!"

"Well—if I do keep a sharp eye upon you," replied Monsieur

Henrion, accommodating himself on a sudden to Gaston's gayety, and adopting a familiar tone, that he might not seem to repel the familiarity of the man of the world, "I have caught you this time, and you will not escape me. . . ."

"I give up at once."

"I know, monsieur, that you lost heavily last night at baccarat."

"So soon? Your police makes its report early."

"Let me know if it is correct."

"I don't know."

"You lost; . . . you owe fifteen thousand francs to Monsieur Henri des Arbois?"

Gaston laughed again. His laugh was nervous, and he had to put his hand to his mouth to conceal that his lips were trembling.

"Well, no, my dear sir," he said; "your police is at fault this time."

"What! you do *not* owe—?"

"I don't *now* owe fifteen thousand francs to my friend Henri. I have paid him."

"Paid!" cried Gabrielle and Monsieur Henrion both together.

"Yes, paid. . . . Go and ask him."

Gaston got up. He made a sudden pirouette with an affectation of extreme, almost boyish, gayety, and waved his hat above his head.

"It is really so," he said, laughing.

"But how did you manage it? Did you borrow?" asked Gabrielle.

"Borrow—borrow from whom? . . . No, I won."

"But," Monsieur Henrion ventured to say, "they told me that when you left the club—"

"To go to supper, yes, I had been losing then, but my luck returned."

"Did you go back to the club?"

"*Ah! ça*, do you mean to put me through a cross-examination?"

Gaston spoke with a laugh, but his words did not come easily. His laugh was thick; still, he recovered himself, and went on volubly:

"There is more than one gambling-hell in Paris, my dear sir; there are said to be five or six thousand of them. So you can judge of my resources. You don't suppose but that Gaston de Monterey has his *entrées* everywhere! Besides, they all know that I am apt to

lose, and they make much of me. But last night I sheared the wool off of other people. See! I have some left."

He put his hand into his pocket for his pocket-book.

"Have you enough left to take up those two protested notes, of a thousand francs each?"

"What notes?"

Monsieur Henrion told him.

"What! haven't I paid them? I thought they were done with long ago. Well, certainly, monsieur; yes, I have the money to pay them. . . . *Tenez!* here are your two thousand francs. There may, besides, be some expenses. These sheriff's officers are usurers, . . . *tenez!* There's enough for the expenses. . . . The rest, if you like, Gabrielle, you can give to your poor people, . . . unless you choose to have a mass said for poor rascals who are cleaned out—"

Gaston dropped back in his chair, and held out some bank-notes to Monsieur Henrion with a trembling hand.

Monsieur Henrion hesitated a moment, then he took them.

"I will send you the protested notes," he said, "and the sheriff's bill, accepted, and the change."

"No, you can give it all to Gabrielle; she can burn the notes, and purify the money."

"As you please."

There was a sudden silence. Gaston was visibly the worse for his sleepless night. He did not try to conceal an enormous yawn, a sonorous spasm which attacked him at this moment.

Monsieur Henrion had no more to say. He took his leave of husband and wife.

Gabrielle went with him through the antechamber, and said in a low voice, with a sigh:

"The moment has not yet come for the sacrifice. Gaston's luck last night postpones it for a while."

"More's the pity."

"You are right; more's the pity. . . . But just see how good he is—how he thought of the poor!"

"Did he think about you last night?"

"Perhaps he did. . . . At any rate, all that will come in time, my friend."

With these words, which her love prompted, but which her reason refused to indorse, Gabrielle went back into her *salon*.

As she walked lightly, her husband did not hear her. She saw

him in a glass. Gaston's pale face had become serious, solemn. His laugh, which had died out on his lips, made his fixed smile a grimace. His look was one of deepest melancholy.

"You are very tired, dear, are you not?" said Madame de Monterey in a maternal tone; "you ought to go to bed."

"What I want most is something to eat," said Gaston, trying to recover his gayety. "I have taken a long walk this morning, and am hungry. Is luncheon ready?"

"Of course."

Gabrielle rang, and said that she was ready for the *second déjeuner*. While waiting the announcement of its being on the table, she sat looking at Gaston with the hesitation of a mother who wants to make an impression on her naughty child, but is not sure if she had better scold or pardon without scolding, or feel satisfied without asking any questions.

This steady look of Gabrielle's disconcerted Gaston.

"Am I anyway changed," he asked, somewhat foolishly, "that you look at me as if you had never seen me before?"

"Yes—you are really very much changed."

"What a horrid compliment!"

"On the contrary, dear, I like to see you thus."

"I should say I was horribly ugly this morning," replied Gaston, with a dandified air, looking at himself, after a moment's hesitation, in one of the great glasses of the *salon*.

"How excited you are!" murmured Gabrielle, thoughtfully; "I never saw you like this. . . . To be sure, I never saw you after you had won a large sum. . . . How much did you win exactly?"

Gaston sprang up, put his arm round his wife's waist, and, seizing one of her hands, said tenderly, as he lifted it to his lips:

"Suppose I promise you never to play cards any more?"

"What, you? *You* never will play cards any more?"

"No, never—for ever! I am tired of this life, which wearies you as much as it does me; which will ruin my health as it has ruined my fortune. . . . I don't mean to leave you any more."

"Oh!—vow of . . . a man who drinks."

"Drinks—yes. But who is not a drunkard," said Gaston, cunningly. "I do assure you you may reform me. It is not too late yet. I am not bad. I have some mad instincts, but then I repent and I am very sorry."

The tears were almost in his eyes, and his voice shook.

Gabrielle, bewildered, but much moved, could not find it in her heart to repel these offers of amendment.

"If I only dared believe you!" she said.

"You must believe me. I want to save myself; I would do anything to do it."

"Anything?"

"Yes, anything. To-morrow I will send in my resignation to the club."

"To the one where you lost; but how about the other, where you won?"

"All. I'll go away from Paris—from France, too, if you like. Let us travel. You will be better able to attend to my cure."

"Would you like to leave Paris?"

"I'll go to-morrow, if you like, or to-day. I'll go to America or Africa, or the ends of the earth."

"But Roger?"

"We can take him with us."

"Of course we can, but the dear little fellow is studying so well at home!"

"A student at seven years old! You can find masters anywhere."

Gabrielle was making these objections only that she might not seem to yield at once.

"We need not go quite so far as the ends of the earth," she said, at last. "There's Italy, for example, or Switzerland."

"Yes; let us go to Italy. We were to have gone there the year after we were married. We can celebrate the year of my reformation. I should like Italy. . . . My father, you recollect, wrote a great deal about Italy. . . . Poor father! He would be very glad if he could hear me speaking thus. So let us go to Italy. . . . Or, would you prefer Germany, England, or Belgium?"

"I should like any country that pleased you."

Gabrielle was easily persuaded.

"And you will love me, over and above everything—won't you, my darling?"

"I can't love you any more than I do."

"That's true. I am an ungrateful boor. You love me dearly. You love me too much. . . . *Tiens!* Let me go down on my knees to you!"

Gaston was speaking with a sincerity which needed the accompaniment of exaggerated theatrical action.

He did not know how to be true, even when he really wanted to be so. The habit of lying gave an emphasis to his most genuine words.

Gabrielle was astounded by the eagerness with which he expressed himself. She was still a little mistrustful, but, before long, yet by degrees she gave herself up to the hope of his reformation.

"May I really believe you?" she asked again.

"Yes—yes—you may believe me. If you doubt me, let us go this evening."

"This evening? No, that would not be possible. Will you be of the same mind when you have breakfasted?"

"Oh, you naughty woman!"

"You are hungry, and they say that fasting promotes penitence."

Gaston let go of his wife and began to laugh—the kind of false laugh he had not laughed for several minutes. He walked two or three times across the room, stamping his foot like a child who insists on being minded.

The servant came in and said luncheon was ready.

"Ah! at last!" sighed Gaston.

He took his wife's arm, instead of giving her his. He leaned upon it heavily, like a man who is weary.

To pass from the *salon* into the dining-room, they had to go through an inner antechamber, where hats and coats were hung.

Gabrielle, feeling how heavily her husband leaned upon her arm, fancied a cane would help him, and, not seeing in this antechamber a thing she saw there every day in its own place, she said to her husband:

"What have you done with your cane?"

Gaston pulled his arm out of hers suddenly.

"My cane?"

"Why, yes. The cane I gave you—the cane with the little steel hammer at the end."

"Ah! yes. True," he said, in a tone that seemed neither very confused nor very repentant—"I forgot it."

"Have you lost it?"

"No—no. I left it at the club. Now I remember."

"Well, then, if you don't mean to go back to the club, we had better send and get it."

"Oh, certainly!"

The breakfast was gay, but the gayety was forced. Gaston had never tried so hard before to be witty and amusing. It seemed almost as if he were trying to shine before his little boy, for very often he turned to him; he questioned him just for the sake of questioning, measuring himself as it were against the little fellow, who knew his Bible history much the best, and shone especially in the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Gaston, who had declared himself famished, ate little, but drank much. When Gabrielle tried to know more about the plans of traveling he had been so keen about, he gave her a quick answer, and turned away his eyes. His wife looked at him too anxiously.

After luncheon, Monsieur de Monterey talked of going to lie down—of taking a *siesta* for a few hours. He promised to be awake before four.

"Yes—do," said Gabrielle, "make up for your lost night. At four o'clock we can go and take a drive, all three of us, . . . to the Bois de Boulogne."

"What an absurd idea!" said Gaston, evidently not gratified.

"On the contrary, dear, it is a very commonplace one."

"To the Bois? When there isn't a leaf on the trees?"

"You are getting romantic, dear Gaston."

"Well, of course. My days of innocence are coming back to me."

He kissed his wife on the brow, and went to his own chamber. Gabrielle, in the distance, heard him lock his door.

It was the first time he had ever taken such a precaution.

"Why should he lock himself in? Is he afraid I shall come and keep him from sleeping?"

She was all day preoccupied and restless. She could not stay in one place, and several times she went and listened at the closed door of her husband's room. She could hear no sound. If he slept, it was the sleep of peace. If he were awake, nothing was exciting him.

"So, if he has anything on his conscience," thought Gabrielle, after her last visit, "it does not trouble him."

It was past four, but Gaston was still locked up in his own chamber. It seemed cruel to rouse him, or to worry him. The idea of driving to the Bois de Boulogne had not seemed to please him. Probably he did not wish to be seen by his club associates



in the character of the reformed husband, taken out for a drive to amuse him.

Gabrielle was very willing to be modest in her triumph, provided that triumph were to be complete. If she must have patience a little longer, she could well afford to wait, she had been patient so long.

But her resolution to be patient made her restless. She could not sit still in one place. She went all over the house, looking into everything, rearranging everything, and giving orders.

As she crossed the antechamber I have mentioned, she noticed that a small cupboard in the wall had its door ajar. In it the manservant was in the habit of putting away various small articles which could not well be kept in the kitchen.

Gabrielle, who was a careful housekeeper—as particular as a provincial mistress of a family I was about to say, but it would be more correct to say, as a good Parisian one—went up to the door to remedy the oversight of the servant.

As she moved the door and tried to shut it, something dropped out at her feet.

It was her husband's cane.

How came it there?

"The careless fellow!" she said, recognizing it, and stooping to pick it up.

The stick was splintered in the middle.

"Ah! that is why he pretended to have forgotten it," said she, with a sigh. "He was telling me a falsehood. He must be very much afraid of me!"

She was moved by this thought, and added:

"It was because this cane was a present from me. He did not dare to own to me that he had let it, somehow, slip under some wheel and get broken. Poor fellow! All the same, he deserves a lesson, and I mean to give it to him."

So, at once ringing for a servant, Madame de Monterey told him to carry the cane to the shop where she had bought it, and ask to have it repaired—that is, to replace the broken stick by a new one, and to have it ready by the next day.

"How I will scold him!" she thought. "He really does seem repentant, the dear prodigal! But I dare not trust him. In three days we can be off for Switzerland. It is very soon. But the trial will be all the more meritorious in him. We can stop at Geneva. I

shall find masters there for Roger. I should prefer Italy, Rome, Naples, Florence! But it is too soon, . . . and, besides, there is a great deal of gambling going on in Italy."

Gaston did not reappear till dinner-time. He was calmer then, but he still seemed decided to amend his life, and, to prove it, he stayed all the evening at home with his wife, though he hardly spoke to her. He had lost the habit of confidential chats, but he sat near her, playing on a side-table innumerable games of *solitaire*, without being able to win one—possibly because he could not fix his mind upon them, possibly because he was out of practice, or possibly because luck was against him.

He gave this last reason for his bad success.

"You see, I am quite right to give up games of chance," he cried, at the close of the evening, with an angry jerk; "the cards all go against me!"

He picked up the packs with which he had been playing and flung them far from him all over the carpet. Then, laughing like a crazy man at his own folly, he went off to bed.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A DISAGREEABLE VISITOR.

THAT Gaston had passed a whole evening at home was a great event in the household.

When he went early the next morning into his wife's chamber, where her little son was already by her side, she received him with a smile, and held out both her hands to him, with absolute confidence of heart.

"So it is all true? You *will* stay with us?"

"Yes," replied Gaston, who was rather pale, smiling, and kissing his wife's hands. "I am going to be wholly yours, but only upon condition that we do not remain here, and that we leave Paris immediately."

"Are you afraid of temptation?"

"Yes; that is what I fear."

"Well, then, I will hurry our preparations. To-morrow, if you like, we can start, and go first to Geneva."

Gaston was determined to be funny. He hummed a tune, but his teeth chattered.

"It is not very hot in Switzerland in March," he said.

"Cold is said to promote virtue."

"Very good, then. We'll go to Geneva," responded Gaston.

Was it the thought of his journey that excited him?—for all that morning Monsieur de Monterey could not stay in one place. Two or three times he seemed disposed to go out-doors; but, though Gabrielle did nothing to retain him, he stopped suddenly, put his hat upon a table, sat down, stretched himself, and very soon began to walk up and down restlessly, making the heels of his boots sound sharply on the polished floor.

"He is not used to being shut up in the house," said Gabrielle; "he needs fresh air."

After breakfast, Gaston tried to go to sleep in an easy-chair. His wife took some worsted-work and sat down near him.

At the end of about half an hour, the front-door bell rang. The sleeper, who was not asleep, started up suddenly.

"Who is ringing in that way?" he cried, nervously. His voice was hoarse and angry.

Had the bell been pulled louder than it should have been, or was the bell itself more loud that day in sound?

A servant came in and said that *a man* wished to speak with Monsieur de Monterey.

He emphasized his being *a man*, as implying that he was not a visitor.

"What's his name?"

"He did not give his name."

"Go and ask him."

"I did. He said Monsieur de Monterey did not know him."

"Then I can't see him. What sort of man is he, anyhow?"

"I don't exactly know, sir. He is not badly dressed, but certainly not like a gentleman; he is rather shabby. He had no gloves on. He is rather like a sheriff's officer."

The valet said "sheriff's officer" with an apparent innocence, but yet he hesitated. His comparing this personage to a sheriff's officer was rather singular, unless by chance he, as his master's accomplice, was in the habit of receiving bearers of protested bills.

Gabrielle laughed, and, rolling up her work, said:

"A sheriff's officer! If he is a sheriff's officer, let him in at once."

The servant went out, and introduced a moment after a person of equivocal appearance and of uncertain apparel, who did in truth bear some resemblance to the men who serve writs; he was more polite, however, than such persons, whether the politeness were real or feigned.

"Excuse me, madame, and you, too, monsieur," he said, in an easy tone, in which no sheriff's officer would have spoken, even had he brought back a note that had been paid—"excuse me, if I take the liberty to trouble you. But I am here upon a matter of great importance, and I trust Monsieur de Monterey may be able to give me some information."

Gaston reddened, bit his lip, which was quivering, and made a sign to the man to explain.

Gabrielle grew very pale, and said:

"Who are you, sir?"

"An employé of the government."

This reply told nothing.

"Of what branch of the government?"

"That of the prefecture."

"The prefecture of the Seine?"

"Excuse me, madame, I thought I had told you—the prefecture of police."\*

"Ah!"

Gabrielle drew back in her arm-chair, and dared not look at her husband, though she said, firmly:

"Go on, monsieur. What can we have to do with the prefecture of police?"

"This is what it is, madame: Yesterday morning was found, in the Bois de Boulogne, the body of a man who had been murdered."

"Murdered?"

"Knocked on the head, one may say, for he did not bleed much. Beside him lay an open pocket-book, in which the men in charge of the Bois found the card of a restaurant. We went to the place. There they told us that the night before the peasant (the man was a

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\* In France the word police applies only to detectives. The street duties performed by our police are in cities confided to *sergents de ville*; and in the country to *gendarmes*, whose officer is called a *brigadier*.—TRANSLATOR.

peasant) had supped in the *salon*, on the first story, at a table next to one where Monsieur de Monterey and some of his friends from the club were having supper, . . . and the *commissaire de police* thought that monsieur might perhaps give us some information—"

"But I know nothing—absolutely nothing," replied Gaston, impatiently and nervously; "do you mean to say that that miserable man, . . . I saw him there, of course. I did not know him. I don't know where he came from. . . . What do you expect me to tell you? It is not usual to come and worry people on the plea that they took supper in the same room as a drunkard—"

"That's true; he was drunk," said the detective.

"If that's all you want to know," said Gaston, "now you know it. I have nothing more to tell you."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I want to know everything about that supper. There were, it appears, at another table some women; . . . the head of the police has their names and addresses."

"Yes, I think it very strange you should come here and talk to me about such people, especially before Madame de Monterey."

"Madame will be so good as to excuse me. I have my orders, and am bound to execute them. Is it true that this unfortunate man boasted during supper of having a great deal of money about him?"

"I think he did."

"Did he show his pocket-book?"

"Yes."

"And let the women see this money? He paid for them too?"

"Very likely."

"Did they go out before he did?"

"I think they did."

"That is a very important point to ascertain. One of them might have pointed him out to one of the roughs who are always such women's friends. He may have followed him. You don't know, monsieur, if the unlucky man made any appointment—?"

"What extraordinary questions you are asking me!" replied Gaston, haughtily. "Do you suppose I know what he did? Do you imagine I concerned myself with what was going on at the table next me? We left the man at the table, and if anything surprises me it is that he should have had the notion, and the strength, to take so long a walk on foot after such a supper. Where was he going?"

Yes, my opinion is he may have been enticed, misled. . . . Do you happen to know if he left in a carriage?"

"No, monsieur."

"I should think it very probable. He may have gone after one of those women. They may have made him still more tipsy. Who knows but that they knocked him on the head as he lay drunk, and had him carried in a carriage to where you found him?"

"That supposition is one that has already occurred to *monsieur le commissaire* of police."

"It seems very likely. . . . At any rate, my friends, whose names they probably gave you at the restaurant as well as mine, can tell you just as much as I have done, but they can tell you no more. I can not imagine why you have done me the honor to come here and cross-examine me."

"It is not a cross-examination, monsieur, it is a simple inquiry—very important, nevertheless, and I have been ordered to see you. Your name was given first, being the one best known in the restaurant. But your friends will probably be questioned, too."

"And what use will you make of the very little I can tell you?"

"Oh! we shall follow it up. In the pocket-book of the deceased was found a letter from a notary directing him to be present at the reading of a will. He probably went there and received a large sum of money which he was carrying about him. Where was he after he left the notary's office till he ate his supper? Did he tell any one else about his legacy? These things we have yet to discover. Meantime, we only know that two hours before the crime was committed, the man in question sat near you at a restaurant, and supped there, that women of loose character got him to pay for their supper, and that they found out what a rich prey such a man might be. As far as these facts go, do you corroborate the testimony of the waiters at the restaurant?"

"Yes, monsieur, all that is perfectly exact."

"I thank you, in the name of the government."

Gaston, struggling against an agitation which he could hardly control, asked:

"Is it likely that I shall be called as a witness?"

"Probably you may."

"But there is nothing more that I can possibly say."

"I do not know—neither do you know, monsieur—if there may not be something else that the court may wish to ask you."

"Ah!"

Gaston seemed very much provoked by this threat of being summoned as a witness, and offended by the sort of magisterial tone assumed by the detective in addressing him.

"I was about starting on a journey," he said, with much annoyance.

"You can go, monsieur, provided you leave word where we may find you. Your written testimony attested by the judge in another department can be taken if necessary."

"I am glad to know it."

Here Gabrielle, who had been listening with deep attention, intervened, and gently but firmly said:

"We can put off our journey if the law needs us, monsieur."

Gaston looked at his wife with a startled air.

"Besides which," she said, with a faint smile, "our journey will be all the more pleasant for being made a little later. We were leaving rather too early."

Gaston dared not object. But he bit his nails savagely.

"It is also possible," continued the detective, "that these circumstances, of great value in the preliminary inquiry, may be found to have no bearing on the case when we get on the track of the criminal. The notary may be able to hasten the discovery of the truth and throw considerable light on our present information."

"The notary?" asked Gaston, almost with a smile.

The detective hesitated, fearing that he might have betrayed the course of inquiry, but, with a man of such social consequence as Monsieur de Monterey, he might surely allow himself to go a little further than was usual in such cases; and, besides, this underling of the police had been hurt by the haughty manners of Gaston. He was not sorry to be able to show the supercilious gentleman that he knew more than he did about some things, and that the police department knew more than all the world.

"If the notary," he said, with an air of familiarity, intended to nettle Gaston, and which avenged him far more than he could estimate—"if the notary has kept the numbers of the bank-notes that he gave him—"

"What about the numbers?" cried Gaston.

He put one hand up to his face to hide a nervous twitching that he could not control, and stuck his nails into his cheeks to hide their pallor.

"Do you suppose the notary—?"

"*Dame!*" continued the detective complaisantly, without looking at Monsieur de Monterey, so well pleased was he to spread himself and to hold forth, "that is a precaution that notaries are very apt to take and always ought to. Watch-makers always do."

"Why do they?" asked Gabrielle, in a sweet and gracious voice, even going so far as to touch with the end of one finger the elbow of the detective, so that he might face round to her and turn his back upon her husband, "please tell me what watch-makers have to do with it?"

She probably knew already all that she asked for, but she appeared to listen with the greatest interest to what was told her about the numbering of watches in their gold and silver cases.

The "employé of the government" told her, in illustration of his subject, quite a long story about a robbery. He had been detailed to get up the case from the first, and, thanks to the number in a watch pledged at the *Mont-de-Pitié*, he had discovered the thief, a person who had not even been suspected.

He had been a young man of good family, who, to pay off a small debt at a gaming-table, had slipped the watch off the looking-glass of a friend who had hung it up there.

Gabrielle, as she listened, kept nodding her head to encourage the narrator to proceed, and to give her all the details of the robbery; she interrupted him now and then to pay him compliments on his sagacity; she said how much she admired the skill of the police, who seemed to find out everything.

"Oh! sometimes our game escapes us," said the triumphant detective, modestly.

Gaston, meantime, had been recovering himself, and his nervousness was no longer perceptible.

The detective departed, charmed with the affability of Madame de Monterey, and without any ill-will toward her husband for his stiffness.

He did not say he was coming back. They did not ask him if he were likely to come. But Gabrielle, without any affectation of unreasonable politeness, but as if she were just about to go through the antechamber herself, showed him out, as if he had been a visitor.

In the antechamber she found her little boy at play.

"Make a bow to monsieur," she said, "and be careful, Roger,



for he is the inspector that government sends round to see if all little boys are very good and never tell stories."

She laughed as she said this. The detective was more than charmed to be thus brought forward in furtherance of such a great lady's maternal solicitude.

"Ah!" said he, in a familiar, friendly tone, "but I see there is nothing for me to do here, and that this little gentleman is always good, and never tells a story."

The boy raised his head proudly, drew himself up, and, with a bold little air, which was, as it were, a bud of truthfulness, said :

"I am not always a good boy, monsieur, but it is true I never tell stories. Mamma would be so sorry!"

"He is the very image of his father," said the detective, who thought he was saying the most flattering thing possible to Madame de Monterey.

Gabrielle was looking down, and had her fingers on her child's curly hair.

She did not disclaim this flattery, against which she protested in her heart; but when the police agent was out of the door, and she found herself alone with Roger, she seized him wildly in her arms and covered him with kisses, saying, as she did so :

"You are right, my darling; never tell a lie, . . . never, never, never!"

Then she said to herself :

"No, no; he must never be like his father! . . . He never shall! I love him too dearly—I love them both too well for that!"

She was just leaving the child to his play when, instinctively looking at the parlor-door, she took his hand and led him in with her.

Gaston was standing up, but moving his feet nervously. He went up to his wife.

"Is it true that we are not to start at once? I wish to be off immediately."

He lowered his eyelids, as liars do when they are losing their assurance.

Little Roger looked at his papa gravely. The man was frightened by the look. The child gazed at him with a man's boldness.

Gabrielle answered :

"We will leave as soon as we can. You heard what he said?"

"Ah! if we had only got off this morning!"

"It was not possible."

"You will regret it."

"In a day or two, *mon ami*, we shall know just where we stand, and then we can stay or go, as we please, without seeming to run away."

Gabrielle's words were uttered with authority, and yet she spoke with a gentleness that was almost plaintive. Gaston, very wroth, began marching up and down the *salon*. His child's presence prevented his giving way before him—perhaps it did him the service of preventing some fatal violence.

Gabrielle was sitting down, and held her son before her. She did not speak, and little Roger stood marveling at the passion of his father, and showing his astonishment so plainly that it checked Gaston.

After trembling a few moments, Monsieur de Monterey said he had a chill.

"It is anything but warm here," he growled.

There had been a fire in the *salon* that morning, but it was nearly out.

Gabrielle, instead of ringing for a servant, took a stick of wood herself out of a box covered with worsted-work and put it on the fire.

Gaston came up and watched the flame, which caught rapidly.

"It must be cold in Switzerland. You are right," he said to Gabrielle; "we had better go a little later."

After a pause—

"We might go to Nice."

She did not answer.

Then came a minute's silence. She rang the bell. The manservant came in.

"Have you done what I told you yesterday?" she said to him.

"Yes, madame; I went and got it back an hour ago."

"Well! Bring it me."

The man left the room. Gaston was warming himself, and had paid no attention to the words that passed between his wife and the servant.

The latter came back, holding in his hand Monsieur de Monterey's cane, or rather a new one.

Gabrielle rose, took the stick, which she concealed by holding her arm down in a fold of her dress, waited till the valet had left the room, and, when she was again alone with her husband and her son, she went resolutely up to Gaston.

"Why did you tell me a falsehood yesterday?" she asked him.

Gaston turned round angrily.

"About what do you think I lied to you?"

"Oh! about nothing in particular. . . . Why did you not tell me you had broken your cane?"

"Who told you that?"

He was livid. His eyes seemed to turn in his head.

"I found it, and I have had it repaired," said Gabrielle. "It was a present from me. I give it back to you."

And smiling, though she felt the moisture rising on her forehead, very pale, and hardly able to stand, she held out to him the cane she had had mended.

Gaston gave a cry, drew back, then, suddenly springing at his wife, he tore the cane out of her hands, bent it in two, broke it, and flung it in the fire.

"Are you mad? . . . What business had you to meddle with that stick?" he growled between his teeth.

Roger, who was standing by his mother, sprang forward, and took the tongs to try and pull the stick out of the fire. It had not yet begun to burn. Gabrielle stopped him.

"Let it burn," she said, almost bitterly. "Your papa is right. It is better it should never be found."

Gaston, terrified, had a moment's indecision. Did he think of falling down at his wife's knees, or of striking her to the earth, or of doing the same thing to his child? He staggered, recovered himself like a drunken man who is conscious of his drunkenness, and, walking stiffly, went out of the *salon*, and slammed the door.

Gabrielle came very near fainting away. The presence of her son, however, kept her alive to the reality of her anguish.

She only fell upon her knees, and, clasping Roger tightly in her arms, she said a prayer in her heart that she dared not utter aloud:

"My God! my God! Have pity upon him. Have pity on his son!"

She burst into tears.

The child looked at the cane, now burning, and asked himself,

as children will, why his papa should have flung it into the fire and made his mamma so sorry.

For the first time in his life he doubted the perfection of his father. This doubt did not harden his heart, but it made it beat faster. He felt springing up in him a new compassion for his mother, which expressed itself at once in passionate kisses, as, weeping in his turn, he flung his arms around Gabrielle, and cried :

"Don't cry, dear little mamma. Papa will never do it again !"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BUTCHER'S SHOP.

JEAN MORTIER'S wife had not slept better that night than Madame de Monterey.

She, too, had sat up for her husband, but her anxiety had been different and she suffered even greater anguish.

Up to ten o'clock in the evening Emilienne Mortier had had patience, and had endeavored to occupy herself by sewing, but her eyes hurt her, she could not see clearly, and, when she had put her little girl to bed, she put out her candle, partly for fear the light might keep the child awake, but still more because in the dark she would feel more alone with her anxiety, and none of her neighbors would find out that she was watching for her husband, expecting his return.

Up to ten, Emilienne's good sense kept her quiet, by suggesting that something she could not have foreseen had taken place, and that she must wait patiently.

If there were bad news, Jean would have come home at once. He was probably detained by the notary to sign papers in consequence of the news being good.

He had had a legacy—that was certain ; otherwise he could have had nothing to keep him out till such an hour, far from his own home.

It had been a sad dinner—only the mother and her little girl ; for, though Emilienne multiplied arguments as to its being foolish to alarm herself, she could not touch her soup, and the child ate very little. Scared by the sadness all around her for many days past, and

infected by her mother's tears, Florence had had no appetite, and had refused to eat.

Then, without trying to force her to eat, Emilienne took her little girl upon her lap, and, pressing her close to her own bosom, covered her with kisses, sighed over her, mutely imploring her to bring her good fortune, for she could not ask her to pray for her or with her.

But a mother, when she is in grief, always fancies that her child is a visible prayer, and that its very innocence is a defense which must be recognized by the justice of Heaven.

The child settled herself quietly in her lap, and was soon sleeping the light sleep that comes from hunger.

Her mother, not daring to undress her, laid her in her father's place on her own bed. If Jean should come in late, toward eleven o'clock, with his legacy in his pocket, or the certain promise of money the next day, they need not mind for once awakening Florence, and letting her sit up to share the supper of rejoicing that on the spur of the moment they would improvise.

If Jean came home disappointed, poorer than ever because his last hope was gone, his wife would need to talk to him so long, to give him a little encouragement, that she need not disturb the sleeping child.

Encouragement! How could Emilienne give it when her own courage was almost at an end?

She had had courage once. She would probably have it again when the cup of misfortune had been drained to the very dregs; but she did not care for courage merely to carry on a hopeless struggle.

Why wouldn't her husband take her advice? He ought long since to have given up his mad, ambitious wish of retaining a shop, which contained but a few articles of furniture, and a work-room of his own, where now she generally worked alone.

It was for her she knew—that she might be a tradesman's wife, free to keep house and mistress of her actions—that Jean persisted in his struggle, or that he had ever engaged in it. It was a proof of his great love. Emilienne had submitted, but she would have overborne his wish in this respect had not a long illness, which weakened her, and made her husband's poverty more desperate, constrained her to a sort of outward resignation.

Now that she was well again, she resolved, if Jean came back

without money from his uncle, that she would take her turn at self-sacrifice. Her mind was made up. She would go out to work by the day for other people, or, better still, because of her little Florence, she would take in work at home.

Many houses in Paris, where materials for covering furniture are sold, make an arrangement with upholsterers, and give out curtains, *portières*, and table-cloths to be made up, which they afterward offer, all ready for use, at extraordinarily low prices.

They pay so little for the making, and the work-people have so little opportunity to stand out for better prices, that they make money on these things.

Jean would easily find work with some upholsterer. He could always make enough to support himself.

Emilienne, up to ten o'clock, comforted herself by these plans, with sudden intervals of hope, for, if Jean had a legacy, it might be enough to let them still retain the shop, and continue to work together to maintain their independence.

Their uncle's inheritance! Why should not Jean inherit it? If he was not the heir, why should he have been sent for? Uncle Fondard must have been moved on reading the touching letter of Jean.

Ah, what a beautiful letter it was! Emilienne had read it; she had kept a copy of it. She knew it by heart. She repeated it to herself, for Jean had spoken of her in it so tenderly that it was like having their courtship over again to think upon his words.

Assuredly, Uncle Fondard must have been touched by Jean's trust in him. That was why Jean had been sent for by the notary, and why he was so late in getting home.

Emilienne was ashamed she had not yet put on mourning for the man they were so much indebted to. Alas! she could not have bought a black dress, nor even have had one dyed. The stores in Boulogne would not have given her credit, and she would have had to pay ready money in Paris, had she bought anything there.

But, by to-morrow, this neglect could be repaired. . . . She would have a mass said for the dead uncle, and another because of her thankfulness to a kind and merciful God. . . .

Emilienne Mortier was small, with black eyes and black hair, a good forehead (rather low) regular features, a slightly shaded mouth with exquisite beauty in its smile, but, at the same time, an expression of energy, that might turn into sternness, when the lips were

drawn together in moments of deep thought or resolution. Her chin, small but prominent, betrayed considerable obstinacy of disposition.

Such a face becomes terrible or soft according to the expression it receives from feeling. When at rest, it always seems as if a threat were underlying it. One says of such faces that they are interesting, because they always have a dramatic interest attached to them.

The little girl Florence had derived from both mother and father the long black hair which was allowed to fall over her shoulders. From her father she had inherited her broad forehead, from her mother her beautiful mouth, and from both together a mixture of intelligence with sweetness, and a half-sad desire to know the troubles of others, which were preparing her to console her parents in their sorrows as soon as she should be old enough to comprehend them, and to help her mother as soon as she had strength.

After ten o'clock Emilienne forgot all her plans, and thought of nothing but the safety of her husband. Could he have met with an accident? She never for one moment supposed him to be drunk; but, if he had money about him, might not some man have followed him, robbed him, attacked him, struck him, killed him?

In a sort of strange vision (a premonition of the fate of the real legatee of Uncle Fondard-Mortier), she saw Jean in the danger which really threatened Pierre, and if I did not shrink from appearing to make light of the tortures of a wife and mother, by giving an undefinable magnetic prescience to her sufferings, I might say that she was agitated and tortured by these fears about the very time when Pierre Mortier was entering the Bois de Boulogne, never suspecting he was followed, watched, and waited for.

From midnight until dawn Emilienne suffered these things.

The little household occupied two rooms and a kitchen. These quarters had been large enough to hold their happiness, they were too large for their present misery. Their rooms were over the shop, and looked on to the street.

Emilienne kept all night passing to and fro from the bed, where Florence lay asleep, to an open window in the outer chamber, and, when she had listened to the almost imperceptible breathing of her child, she went back and listened to the awful silence of the empty street.

In the early hours before dawn the street was so perfectly still, and Florence breathed so gently, that for one moment Madame

Mortier thought she was going out of her mind. She fancied her child was dead, and that the solemn silence without was intended to announce to her the death of her husband.

She took the child in her arms. Florence awoke very easily. It almost seemed as if her sleep had been unreal.

Emilienne asked her little one to forgive her for awaking her. She covered her with kisses, and tried to put her to sleep again. But the poor little thing had possibly been roused from a dream in which she had seen her mother distracted, and, like a little guardian angel, she refused to go to sleep. She wanted to stay awake like her little mamma.

Emilienne wrapped her in a shawl, and, carrying her with both arms under her, as beggars do their babes when they want to excite compassion, she went softly down-stairs, opened the door of the shop, and went out into the street.

She could not stay in that dark house. She must go into the open air—she must go and meet her husband.

If he did not come home, she would never return. She walked on, and on, carrying her child.

She went down the street.

A butcher, one of her neighbors, was opening the barred windows of his shop, and setting out his meats in the early morning.

Madame Jean Mortier owed a big bill to this butcher. If he noticed her strange actions at such an hour, she feared he might think she was going to run away—to break up housekeeping, and to pay no one in the village.

She thought it better to go into his shop, and prevent suspicion.

He was astonished to see her up so early.

Then she told him that she was very anxious. Her husband had left her to go and see a notary, and get a legacy from his uncle Fondard. He had not come home all night. Suppose anything had happened to him!

The butcher was an excellent man. He knew very well that, if the young couple did not pay him, it was from poverty, not from want of honesty. He proposed to Madame Mortier to harness his horse to his cart and to drive her to the notary's.

Emilienne did not accept the offer; she thought it better to wait. The notary must be in bed. Jean must have left there long since. She might miss him on the road.

Then, for an hour, she walked back and forth before the butch-



er's shop, rocking Florence in her arms. But Florence would not sleep. Every now and then Emilienne asked what time it was, thinking that sunrise came very late; she felt as if she could see better into what was before her if she could only have the light of the sun.

About six o'clock in the morning, she heard a step in the direction of the Bois.

It might have been that of a workman going to his work; but she went quickly toward it with a beating heart.

A man was coming along slowly, stopping, hesitating, staggering as he came.

She recognized him from afar, more by the beating of her own heart than by any other thing.

It was her husband. Could he be drunk? Had he been carousing over his inheritance?

She would scold him by-and-by. The first thing to be done was to get him home. She ran up to him. She touched him with her child.

"Jean, is this you? Where do you come from?"

Jean raised his head. If he were drunk, it must have been from drinking tears. Day was breaking, and it showed her a livid face; his hair, which he wore long and thrown back, was now in wild disorder, tangled and matted over his broad forehead. His cravat was untied, as if he had been in a struggle. He had earth-stains on his hands, elbows, and knees. He had either fallen or he had rolled himself in the mud. He looked at his wife. His stupefaction passed off quickly when he saw the gleam in the dark eyes that were questioning him.

"Ah! Emilienne, what brings you here?"

"Could I go to bed all night? . . . Has anything happened to you?"

"No—nothing."

"Have you been supping, . . . drinking?"

She said this merely to make believe she had not been distractedly anxious about him. She did not really think he was returning from the *cabaret*.

Jean gave the ghost of a sad smile.

"I am hungry—I am thirsty!" he stammered; and then he almost fell.

Emilienne knew at once that he had eaten nothing since he left

her, after breakfast, the day before, and, what was more, she divined the disaster he had not yet announced to her, their greater poverty, and his despair. She saw that he had not had the courage to come home. He did not dare to tell her his misfortune.

She put her little girl down. She held her by one hand, while with her other arm she supported her husband.

"Come, Jean, be a man," she said, with a feverish kiss upon his cheek, "pluck up your courage. You frightened me dreadfully—indeed you did! But that is nothing; come, let us go in. We can talk it all over."

"My poor Emilienne! . . . my poor little Florence!"

She led him tenderly toward home. They had to pass before the butcher's door. The good man was outside, hanging up a sheep with a crook on a long stick.

"Well," said he, gayly, "so you have got him back, Madame Mortier—that good-for-nothing husband of yours! Does he bring home the legacy?"

Jean shivered from head to foot; he gave a deep sigh.

"Been drinking, . . . eh?" said the butcher, with a hoarse laugh.

"Ah, monsieur," replied Emilienne, "he has not got the legacy. . . . He is in despair, and half dead with hunger and thirst."

Jean nodded his head as if to confirm his wife's words.

"Come in," said the butcher, kindly, bringing forward a stool.

"Water—a little water!" murmured Jean Mortier, sinking down on the wooden seat offered to him.

The butcher went into his back shop to get some wine.

Jean, while he was gone, found strength to whisper to his wife:

"You ought not to have said that before him, . . . we owe him so much!"

"He is a good man."

The butcher came back quickly with a large glass of wine and a big slice of bread.

"Tenex, neighbor, take that. It is so early that I have not got any soup; but in an hour or two come over and get some, Madame Mortier. I'll *give* you some."

He emphasized the word *give*.

"Thank you, monsieur, but I—"

"Oh, I'll put it on the bill—never fear!"

Emilienne thanked him by a quick glance. She helped her hus-

band to drink the wine. She held the glass. She dipped some pieces of the bread in it and tried to make him eat.

The butcher had set to work again. He was laying out his merchandise. He did not want to listen to what these poor people were saying to each other, but unhappily he heard it all.

It was Emilienne who first alluded to the sad subject. She felt that it was best Jean should be delivered from his dread of owing to her his disappointment and despair.

"Why did the notary send for you?" she said.

"To tell me that my uncle had thought of me . . . too late!"

"Only for that? That was well worth while! So we have nothing?"

By this collective fashion of accepting the misfortune, by this *we*, which associated her disinheritance with that of her husband, Emilienne naïvely showed her strength of will and her love for him.

"Pierre has it all!" replied Jean.

"Pierre? Who is he?"

Emilienne tried to remember. Her husband had seldom spoken to her of this relation.

"Yes, Pierre—you know—my first-cousin. He is rich; he did not need it. Ah! the hard-hearted miser!"

"Did you ask him to give you anything?"

Here Emilienne frowned.

"Yes—for your sake."

"You were crazy!"

"It was more for the little one's."

"Ah! you are so loving! But, all the same, you ought not to have asked him."

As she said this, she was smoothing and disentangling Jean's hair with one hand. Florence, who was wide awake, was looking at her father with big eyes, and was leaning up against him.

Jean bent down. He had drunk enough. He put the glass, which he had not emptied, to the lips of his little girl. She took a sip.

"And he refused you?" said Emilienne, taking away the glass, for Florence was not used to wine.

"Yes, he did," said Jean, with an explosion of pain and anger—"he *did* refuse me, roughly, as if I were a dog. I only asked him for a little share. Ah! the black-hearted scoundrel!—and after that, my poor Emilienne, I went crazy. I didn't want to come home. I

went all over Paris, looking for him. I could not find him. I thought he would relent in the end. I don't know where I went, nor what guided me back here. In the Bois I fell down. I lay there for hours, crying like a fool—I had to; it was just that that kept me from killing myself."

"Oh, you wicked, wicked man!—and you never thought of us?"

"I thought too much of you!"

"Well, never mind now; it was too bright a hope. We were wrong ever to have counted on it. There is nothing changed in our life; we are this morning just where we were this time yesterday. Come, don't be cast down, . . . there are plenty of kind people in this world. We will work hard. You were wrong not to come straight home. You made me pass just as bad a night as you did. Now, then, let us go home. Lean on me. There! drink that drop."

"No, thank you, I have had enough."

There was a little wine in the glass. Emilienne drank it. It had been a species of communion for the three: father, child, and wife had shared the glass.

Emilienne, as she drank, recovered courage.

"Thank, you, monsieur," she said to the butcher.

"Oh, that's nothing, Madame Mortier. Don't forget to come for the soup."

"I shall forget nothing," said the poor woman, holding out her hand.

The butcher wiped his own, fat, strong, and red, with blood upon it, before pressing softly the offered hand of the wife of the upholsterer.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### GOOD NEWS.

HUSBAND, wife, and child walked slowly and softly, and entered their shop at sunrise.

Had they better take down the shutters? Had they better seem to recommence their daily life of useless toil and hopeless struggle?

What was the use—the struggle was over now?

The neighbors all knew of their ruin. Those who passed by would pay no regard to that dim house with its eyes closed. There was nothing to be done but to wait for the grave-digger, in other words, the sheriff's officer, and to let him do his work.

In his bedroom, Jean threw himself upon his bed, clasping the bedclothes round him, as if to hold on to some remnant of his lost happiness, or at least to say farewell to it, and began to sob.

His wife was utterly cast down and discouraged; she lifted her little girl upon her knees.

She did not at once try to console her husband. She thought this first explosion of his grief would comfort him. For her part, she had ceased to weep; she was thinking over the next thing to be done.

First of all, and before they were cast out of their little home, she must go round and tell all their creditors in the neighborhood that if they went away it would not be to escape their obligations, but to earn money to pay them. If any did not understand the honesty and sincerity of this declaration, so much the worse for them!

Emilienne felt herself becoming proud and strong. It seemed to her that, if she left her home with one hand on the arm of her husband, the other leading her little girl, she ought to be revered and pitied, and that some happy chance would surely meet them on their road.

People feel that kind of superstition when they are going through an unmerited trial. However submissive innocence may be outwardly to injustice, it consoles itself in secret by the testimony of its own conscience, which, upholding its rights, prepares it to accept whatever may be in store.

It is the noblest natures that grow hopeful when brayed in a mortar or put into a crucible.

At last, after an hour of silent misery, Madame Mortier said to her husband:

"You are making yourself poorer still, my love, and losing time in grieving. I am going round the village; I will speak to our landlord."

"What do you mean to say to him?"

"Simply the truth. If I can make him understand that we have had and we have lost the chance of paying him this morning, perhaps he will pity us. I will go and see the others. As to the butcher, there is no need. I will bring you something for breakfast."

"Have you any money?"

"A little. But you know the *bouillon* will be put upon the bill. . . . We must accept that much, Jean; it is due to the neighbor who is so friendly to us."

"Take Florence with you."

"Oh, no; it would look as if I were using the child to rouse their pity. I will speak to them all—without crying. That is over; I shall shed no more tears; they spoil the eyes, and I shall want my eyes for sewing. While I am gone, get together such things as the law allows us to take away with us; they are not many. . . . The butcher will lend us his wagon, I am sure. . . . Come, there are plenty of people worse off in the world than we are, Jean!"

"I don't know any."

"Well! those who have deserved to suffer; those who have no children; those husbands and wives who don't love each other."

"That's true," responded Jean, rousing himself a little, "since *you* don't blame me—"

"Blame you! for what, pray?"

"Ah! young and pretty as you are, Emilienne, you ought to have married a better man than I."

"I could never have found a better husband."

Jean made a movement to protest.

"A good man—yes, I was a good man up to yesterday; but I am not as good as I was then. . . . When I saw how unjust Fate had been to me, I seemed to go mad. . . . I felt myself capable of anything. Ah! there are men who become robbers and murderers under less temptation—and who are yet not thoroughly bad men."

Emilienne put her hands over his mouth to silence him, with a laugh that had in it a ring of terror. "Will you hold your tongue," she cried, "and not talk as if you could possibly have been guilty of a wickedness which you never could have come to? Could you bring yourself to act like a bad man? Could you forget the sweet eyes of your little daughter, which would look into your very soul? Come, you are going out of your senses; it is fatigue—it is hunger. . . . If you could only go to sleep!"

"Here? When I am expecting—"

"Oh! it is not ten o'clock, and the sheriff's officer won't be here till midday. Lie down in your clothes. Florence slept in your place last night. She, too, dear little soul, needs some more sleep,

Let her lay her head on your arm, and go to sleep, both of you, while I make my rounds. Who knows?—perhaps I shall wake you up with some good news!”

Jean very seldom set himself in opposition to his wife. Besides, he was in the limp state of those whose nervous natures have been overstrained, and who give up at once when brought face to face with a calmer, steadier will.

“I’ll try,” he said, humbly.

He kept on his clothes, but took his hammer out of his apron pocket and laid it on the bureau.

Emilienne noticed mud upon it.

Then, caressing his little girl and laying her down beside him on the bed, Jean said :

“Come, Florence, we must mind mamma. You will, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said the child, who was very pale, but who seemed to have by instinct some of her mother’s spirit, for, with her little hands, she was coaxing and stroking her father’s face, to try and calm him.

When Madame Mortier saw her *two babies* getting ready to go to sleep, if not asleep already, she smoothed her hair and tried to remove from her face all traces of her anxious, sleepless night.

From the same motive that had made her decline to take her little girl with her when she went to see her creditors, she wanted, by her good appearance, to inspire confidence in her courage.

She had to convince those who might mistrust her, of the honesty and good intentions of herself and husband.

She went out and made her rounds bravely.

She was everywhere received with that cold politeness which implies more displeasure than respect, and which seems to say to the honest, brave, intelligent wife of a man who is unfortunate :

“Why didn’t you prevent your husband from getting into debt and trouble?”

Emilienne could not tell them :

“I have been ill ; I had full confidence in the skill of my husband ; I believed in him as much as in myself—”

She bent, with sublime resignation, under their tacit reproaches, all the more painful because these trades-people were generally civil and in most cases mute.

She ended by going to the butcher’s. In his shop she could let fall some tears, and almost own that life was very hard to her.

The butcher gave her the soup he had promised, and offered her some more for that evening. He also said he would help her in any little way he could as to their moving.

Emilienne had been out nearly two hours. She had not hurried herself. She thought Jean would be asleep, and little Florence. Provided she was home before twelve o'clock, she had no reason to think the sheriff's officer would be beforehand with her.

When she had almost reached her own house, she saw the postman standing before the door, looking at the address of a letter before knocking.

He seemed astonished to find the shutters unopened at that hour. He was just about to rap when Emilienne, coming quickly up to him, said :

"No; don't make any noise."

"Ah! is there any one sick at your house, Madame Mortier?"

"No; but my husband came home very late last night, and is asleep; my little girl, too."

"At this time of day?"

"Yes."

A postman is a peripatetic philosopher; he has not much time for investigations. This one held out a letter.

"This is for you."

Emilienne took the letter and recognized her husband's writing. She became very pale as she saw on the envelope her husband's address in his own hand.

Had the poor fellow been tempted the day before to kill himself, and had he thus written his last farewell to his wife?

Madame Mortier set down on a stand the great cup of *bouillon* that she had in her hand, and, taking the letter that she dared not open before the postman in both hands, said :

"Ah! I know who it is from. We were expecting this letter."

The postman went on.

Then trembling, all alone, feeling her knees give way under her, Emilienne felt of the paper which she had no doubt contained the last desperate cry of despair from Jean.

She wanted to guess what was in it before reading it, and then when she had read it she resolved to hide it forever from her husband, that she might not shame him by recalling to him his weakness.

We know what Emilienne found in the envelope.



When she saw the two bank-notes of one thousand francs each, she uttered a cry. A cold sweat came out over her face. She ran back into the darkest part of the shop, and let fall the envelope with the money half stuffed back into it.

A thousand fears assailed her, overwhelmed her, stifled her at once.

Where did that money come from? How could Jean have got it? Why had he put it in a letter and directed it to himself? Why did he not bring it home with him? Had his despair, his hunger, and his weariness been feigned? Did he want to increase her great surprise by giving her so terrible a fright? It was not possible that Jean could have been deceiving her. But if he had, what motive could have prompted him to do it?

At the end of two minutes of agitation, Emilienne began to recover her self-possession.

She stooped down, picked up the envelope, went toward the front door of the shop (though she hid herself behind it), and examined it attentively, hoping that this second examination might prove that she was mistaken as to the address being in her husband's writing.

But no. It certainly was his. He assuredly had written it, and even in writing his own name he had been led, by the habit of signing it, to make the beginning of a flourish such as is not put on an address, but to a signature.

The paper seemed to burn Emilienne's fingers.

She said to herself he must have stolen the money, and that it must at once be sent back.

Yes—it was stolen money. She thought of the theft first, without thinking of the thief. She could think of him later.

She put the envelope in her bosom; picked up her cup of *bouillon*, and walked up-stairs steadily as if suddenly invested with the character of a judge. She must make her inquiries coldly and deliberately, and resolve how to meet this new misfortune before any one, sharp-eyed, like a sheriff's officer, came in to trouble her.

She set down the breakfast on the table in the dining-room, and went into her own chamber.

Jean had fallen into a doze. His wife's kindness had relieved the strain on his nerves, had calmed him, lulled him, put him to sleep.

Emilienne's very love now made her without pity. She went up

to the bed, and, shaking her husband by the arm, cried in a loud, sharp voice :

"Jean!—wake up."

Jean opened his eyes.

He came to a sense of what was around him at once.

"What? Are they come?"

"No. Here's a letter for you."

"A letter?"

Emilienne did not show him the envelope. It was not light enough for her in the chamber near the bed. She wanted to see her husband's looks, to question him where she could watch his face standing in the full light—near the window.

She drew him there by a sign.

Jean disengaged his arm which was under his little girl's head, and laying Florence gently back on her pillow (for the child moved slightly), he rose and went to where his wife stood waiting for him.

"Do you know that writing?" asked Emilienne, in a voice that she was unable to steady, and which had in it a sharp ring.

Jean opened his eyes; they were wild with fright.

"My address!"

"Did you write that yourself?"

"Oh, yes, I did!" he said, with a choking in his voice, which misled his wife; "it is the address I wrote on the envelope at the notary's."

"Did you put these in the envelope?"

Emilienne suddenly pulled out the bank-notes.

Jean drew back mute, paler than ever. At first he could not articulate a word. Then with a violent convulsion of the throat he murmured :

"Ah! Pierre has sent them to me!"

He staggered. The two notes seemed to him like rays of light, they dazzled him, they overpowered him.

As he feebly stretched out his hand to take them, Emilienne drew them back, and, with a severity that happily her husband did not notice, said :

"How came Pierre to send you these notes in an envelope directed by yourself?"

Jean lifted up his arms, and tried to laugh.

"Oh! I did not tell you! . . . I didn't remember to tell you all about it—"

Then, suddenly melted and excited all at once, he cried :

"*Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu !* I am saved. . . . My dear cousin ! . . . and to think I should have blamed him !"

He did not notice the doubt which was, however, visible enough on his wife's face. He thought of nothing but the surprise.

The joy that overspread his face was so great, so real, it seemed to take away his breath, and Emilienne was already half convinced before he had told her anything.

"Come, tell me then, what happened?" she asked. Her tone was motherly.

Jean told her at once all that had passed between himself and his cousin. He explained why he had given him his address, and added, with a burst of gratitude :

"He must have been sorry afterward ; . . . the notary must have told him to do it. All the same, . . . I am just as thankful to him as if he had done it out of his own head. . . . Ah ! there's the same blood in our veins ; nobody was ever cruel in our family. . . . I told him about you, and about the little one. . . . He'll be here before long—that's certain. He won't stop at this. . . . Let me look at them. . . . Two thousand francs ! . . . Is it really just two thousand francs ? That is just the very sum I asked of him. . . . It is enough. Now we have that, we shall get on. . . . Go quickly and pay the butcher, and buy something for breakfast. . . . I am very hungry. . . . The sheriff's officer will soon be here. He'll find things different from what he expects. . . . Ah ! how wrong one is ever to doubt Providence ! Whatever some people may say, there is a good God over us. . . . Ah, Emilienne ! I have earned this happiness by suffering. You don't know how much I have suffered !"

He fell back on a chair, laughing and crying all at once. Florence rose up from her pillow. The poor little thing was not used to hear her father laugh.

"You have woken Florence," said Emilienne, still bewildered by her doubts, but enjoying the happiness of her husband.

"Never mind," cried Jean. "She will sleep all the better by-and-by."

He took his little daughter in his arms, caressed her, and covered her with kisses.

"Florence, there came a good fairy while we were asleep. You

shall have the doll I promised you, . . . and before that . . . a good breakfast. Laugh a little, pet—you see I am laughing."

The poor little thing began to smile. Jean became grave again, for a moment sobered by her obedient gayety.

"And that's not all, Florence," he said. "You must say a little prayer—*tiens !*—put your little hands together, and say after me, O my God—"

"O my God—"

"Keep our good cousin Pierre in good health."

The child made a prodigious effort to repeat so long a sentence; twice she failed, but then she said it rightly. Jean kissed her again, and, looking up at his wife, said :

"You see, Emilienne, you are making me pious. That prayer may bring Pierre good luck."

Emilienne burst into tears. She was tempted to fall down on her knees at her husband's feet, and to ask him to forgive her for the terror she had felt about those two bank-notes. But she did not dare. However, she leaned over him, and putting both arms round his neck and kissing his forehead, she said :

"Ah ! *mon ami—mon ami !* how happy I am ! Yes, you are right ; let us return thanks to the good God. But that is not enough. I will go to church. I will offer a candle—"

"Offer two ; but, first of all, go and pay everybody. I'll open the shop. I don't want any more closed shutters. Is it twelve o'clock ?"

"No."

"We shall have time to recover ourselves before the sheriff gets here. Won't he be astonished ! . . . Will two thousand francs be enough ? I can't remember. . . . Yes. . . . And, besides, I can begin by paying on account ; the officer said that would be accepted, . . . but, no !—Go on, pay it all away. We may have nothing left by night, but we shall be able to walk before all the world with our heads high. There is some little money owing to me for work done at Neuilly and at the village of St. James. Ah ! how strong I shall feel for work now ! Just think, two thousand francs all our own, that we have not got to return ! . . . Oh, that good Pierre ! perhaps he will lend me a little more. And I was threatening him ! . . . I could have strangled him yesterday, . . . but I'll feast him to-day !"

"Are you sure he will come ?"

"*Parbleu!* he must come to see the happiness he has given us. It is such great happiness! The notary, too, was a kind man. I'll go and make him a visit. Leave one of those notes on the chimney-piece, . . . and go and get the other changed at the butcher's, for I don't suppose you have change for a thousand-franc note in your drawers, have you?"

He was joking at his past poverty.

Emilienne was about to fling away the envelope, but Jean took it out of her hands.

"I shall have it framed," he said, waving it in the air. "Meantime, I'll put it there in the frame of the glass. . . . *Hein!* how nicely I wrote the address!—and yet I could not see; my sight was all blurred. I never thought I could write so well. Did the post-man know the letter contained two thousand francs?"

"No."

"Bah! you will have to tell him."

"You are crazy, my poor Jean!"

"Crazy I may be, but poor I am not. You told me once before, to-night, that I was crazy when I told you I had asked Pierre to help me. . . . Now, Mrs. Pride, was I crazy to have softened his heart, to have made him give me all that money? Ah! I'd like to be crazy over and over again, if this would come of it! But no; it was very good for once. Now we must go to work. Make haste and go to the butcher's."

"I am going. He gave me some *bouillon* on credit."

"I don't want any more credit. Go and pay him first of all."

"Yes, I will, provided you will drink your *bouillon* first."

Jean went into the little room which served for a dining-room, picked up the bowl full of *bouillon*, drank part of it, felt himself refreshed, and gave some to his little girl; Emilienne drank the rest. It was their second communion. This time it was one not of sorrow, but of joy.

He went down-stairs and opened his shop, while his wife went out, charged with a commission to bring back a doll for Florence.

As noon was striking, the sheriff appeared. Jean Mortier received him with a smile.

"I am going to pay you."

"I am glad to hear it," said the sheriff.

"Really!—are you really glad of it?"

The sheriff, who was a burly, well-to-do man, loving his own ease, and not at all fond of trouble, replied, like a good fellow:

"Do you suppose I take any pleasure in turning people out of their homes?"

"But you get your living out of debtors who can't pay?"

"Yes—just as a doctor gets his out of the sick, provided they last. The diseases that kill people too fast, and don't give them time to take much physic, are bad for the doctors—and just the same with us and our clients. We are not as fierce as the creditors who set us on to do their work for them. We are their teeth and claws. But, when we have to deal with a good man like you, we are charmed if he can get out of our power."

Jean had never supposed that the sheriff who had been so terrible to him was so clever a fellow—so ready with his sympathy, so full of kind feeling.

As they talked, the sheriff proceeded to offer his advice and experience as to how the upholsterer had better manage his affairs for the future. He showed him what ways he might take to make his creditors patient, and ended by even offering to lend him a little money as soon as he should have sold his present place, which would be before long.

As he went away, he kissed Florence.

Jean was charmed by this visit. He felt convinced that there were not so many bad men in the world as he had fancied. It was all a prejudice of those in need to fancy sheriffs have no heart, butchers no kind feeling, and to think that country farmers are coarse, selfish, and absurd.

Emilienne, too, came back much satisfied. The news of their good luck, which she had spread all over the village, had been everywhere received with sympathy.

"I didn't know people liked us so much," she said, naively.

"Why shouldn't they like us?" said her husband, who felt his heart big enough to take in the whole world.

They had another breakfast, more substantial than the first. They could not but make a little feast in honor of their deliverance.

Madame Mortier had brought back a superb doll for Florence, carefully sewed in all the fragile parts, with a china head and beautiful curled hair, inserted into a foundation of cork, the latest marvel in dolls at that day. Jean promised the doll a set of furniture, and meantime set to work in his workshop.

He worked eagerly, but not steadily, for every quarter of an hour he went and looked up and down the street to see if he could not perceive his cousin Pierre.

The neighbors, who were accustomed to Jean's sad face, now, seeing him so bright, said to him :

"Ha, neighbor, you must have got a legacy during the night !"

"May be I have," said Jean, good-humoredly. He felt as if he wanted everybody to share in his happiness.

Emilienne completed her arrangements, and made her purchases for dinner, without allowing herself to indulge in any extravagancies, or spending too much of that precious money which had its destination sacredly marked out elsewhere ; but she fancied Cousin Pierre must be a man to like a good dinner and a good bottle of wine.

Perhaps, too, she thought, he might bring with him a surprise, his contribution to the feast—his dish of welcome. It was not calculation on her part, their cousin's visit would make her still more glad, and draw closer together the ties of gratitude and friendly feeling.

The day passed, but no Pierre arrived.

Toward dark Jean became thoughtful, and, as there was no more light to work by, he went out hoping to meet Pierre somewhere by the Bois or on the banks of the Seine. He saw nothing of him.

When he came home to dinner, lassitude had got the upper hand. Tired alike by his joy and his anxiety, he ate little. He felt sorry he had not gone as far as Paris.

It was true that he did not know where to find his cousin.

Pierre had very sulkily taken Jean's address, but he had not given him his own. It was possible that, after putting the envelope in the post, he might have forgotten what was written on it, and that he might be as much puzzled how to get at Jean as Jean would be to find him in Paris.

"And yet," said the upholsterer, "Boulogne is not so big a place, and every one here knows me. Very early to-morrow morning I will go and see the notary. I ought to pay him a visit. He will help me to find Pierre. Then we can all three thank him, and invite him to come to us. That will be best, won't it, Emilienne? Won't it, Florence?"

And, as he looked at his little girl as he said this, and saw her very busy with her doll, he added, smiling :

"We will all four go. Dolly shall go with us too."

Emilienne had set by part of the dinner made ready for the cousin, that dinner which the cousin never came to eat. It, however, had been very nice and good, though not quite so lively as the breakfast at midday. Regret for the absent guest made them a little melancholy.

Father, mother, and daughter went to bed early, and slept almost as soundly in the bed, that no one was coming next day to take from under them, as Cousin Pierre slept, lying at that hour on his cold couch at the Morgue, with the trickle of a little stream of water descending on his head.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### AWAKENED.

JEAN was afoot early.

The day dawned clear and bright. To go and see the notary would take him about two hours, not more. He had only to cross the Bois de Boulogne.

He promised Emilienne to come back with a sharp appetite, and set forth gayly, after a hearty kiss to his wife, and a lighter one to Florence, whom he wanted to leave asleep, poor little thing, after the various excitements of the preceding day.

As he walked along he dreamed dreams that he had had no chance to dream in the night, so sound had been his sleep during the night watches.

The present he had received had been, indeed, a great act of friendship on the part of his cousin.

Mechanics, in towns, who have given up their villages to better themselves, and perhaps to become *bourgeois*, are often unjust toward those whom they leave behind them to the plow. Because he had thought himself a little more civilized than his cousin, he might have done him injustice. Under the rude husk of a horse-jockey or a cattle-dealer there had been real feeling, the same as under the thinner skin of a citizen. Pierre's offer of having him live with him had not, he now saw, been a matter of calculation, and he had offered to take in Jean's wife and little girl.

The upholsterer in one part of the wood breathed a vague odor



of spring. He saw some pretty children coming toward him, three little girls, whom their governess was taking to walk early, and who, with the wind in their faces, their cheeks rosy—nay, reddened—by contact with the breeze, which was a little too strong for them, were laying in a store of health and gayety, before going indoors to their lessons.

Jean thought to himself that Boulogne was as much in the Bois as Saint-James; but *he* had no governess to take Florence into those beautiful walks, and let her begin her day by enlarging all her being by breathing the fresh air and the invigorating odors of the trees.

One of these three little girls seemed exactly the same age as Florence: he could see that; but what a difference there was between them in complexion, health, and gayety! He felt jealous of the ruddy bloom on the cheeks of the child who was wealthy when he thought of his own pale child.

After all, Florence might have something better than the Bois de Boulogne: she might go and live on a farm; she might run in and out of the stables; she might share the joys of village life. Without giving up his business now that he could keep on at it, and pursue it again with every chance of success and ultimate prosperity, why might he not send his wife and daughter to pass a month—ay, two months—at La Teste-Muiron? He would only have to miss them during the week, for on Sundays, very early, he could take the Eastern Railroad and be with them by breakfast-time.

Pierre was a bachelor. Would it be proper that, even in company with her little girl, Emilienne should go and stay with him? Bah! anything was proper for Emilienne, so gentle yet so spirited. And, after all, that was no great difficulty; that might be settled, even if they had to find a wife for Pierre, who would be much more likely to take kindly to matrimony now that a breach had been made in his heart, and his natural kindness had found a vent. . . .

My reader must not expect me to tell him all the dreams that Jean carried along with him in his basket of eggs, according to the Eastern story, or, as the French tell it, in his *pot au lait*. It is a universal fairy-story, but it never seems to have any effect on anybody, and yet it ought to breed mistrust when the imagination runs away with us in day-dreams.

Popular wisdom has invented a long string of proverbs opposed to the intoxications of hope; but people forget the proverbs. Each

one thinks the little, round, stuffed cushion he bears on his head to support his milk-pail or his egg-basket will be secure. His milk-pail or his egg-basket is not likely to upset, nor its contents to be spilled or broken, and he knocks boldly at the door of Fate to leave her the cream that has been rising, without ever thinking that Fate may shut the door in his face, crush him and kill him, or, at best, that the door, suddenly closing, may knock him down. . . .

Jean opened the door of Maître Boisselot's office with considerable confidence. This time he was not afraid of a cold reception from the young men. As he knew himself to be no longer in need, no longer a suppliant, he felt that he could afford to bear the impertinence of young clerks who do not like being interrupted; and, besides, he only wanted to ask them one question.

He went in.

The youngest of the three clerks saw him first, and, taking his feet from the second rung of his high stool, said, with an air both sarcastic and alarmed:

"*Tiens!* talk of the devil—"

The chief clerk stopped him, and, raising his head, recognized Jean Mortier. He got up and went toward him; surprise was in his face and his eyes had a strange look in them.

"What are you doing here, monsieur?"

"I wanted to see Maître Boisselot."

"Then you have not been arrested?"

"Arrested?—Who? I?"

Jean's astonishment did not prevent his turning very pale. Fear and presentiment were stronger than amazement.

"What has happened?" he stammered.

"Be off—be off at once as fast as possible! The police must be already at your house in search of you!"

"Police? In my house?"

Jean had been much shaken in the last two days. His strength now failed him. He stretched out a hand to catch hold of a chair. The chief clerk, who was quicker than he, drew back the chair, and, pointing to the door, said:

"Don't stay here another minute, monsieur! . . . they are in search of you. Maître Boisselot is at this moment with the *juge d'instruction*."

"The *juge d'instruction*?"

"Yes. Your coming here, if they knew of it, would be another

proof against you. You have come, of course, to ask us not to repeat what we overheard the day before yesterday."

"No. I wanted the address of my cousin Pierre, if you happen to know it."

Jean did not ask this question as he had intended to ask it. His voice trembled. He had all the appearance of telling a lie.

A simultaneous exclamation broke from the three clerks. They looked stupefied, and all spoke at once.

"What audacity!" said the first clerk.

"You don't want his address," said the second. "They'll take you before long to look at him."

"Go to the Morgue," said the third.

All Jean heard or understood was this last reply, uttered in sharp accents.

"To the Morgue?" he said. "Has he met with any accident?"

"Yes," said the chief clerk. "He has been murdered."

"Murdered! When?"

"A few hours after he met you here, and that is why they are looking for you."

"Looking for me?"

"Of course. And that is the reason you had better not go home."

Jean drew himself up to his full height. But the indignation which had roused his spirit gave way when he thought that his wife and daughter, if he were not in, would have to encounter the police alone.

He uttered one cry, and, without saying another word, rushed out of the office, leaving the door open behind him.

The three clerks all came out into the street, and watched him as he hastened away.

"He is going to fling himself into the Seine," said the youngest.

"He'll take the railroad, and escape," said the second.

"No; I think he is going home," said the chief clerk, "and, after all, it is probably the best thing he can do."

Jean rushed on at full speed, as if he were pursued, or attracted by a loadstone.

He barely paused, from time to time, to take breath. Every moment lost seemed to him to augment some monstrous unknown peril.

He could not think it all out—he would not. But many thoughts were passing through his brain. What would Emilienne testify if she should be examined before he came?

How would they interpret his having gone out early? Might they not fancy he was not coming back—that he was running away? On the contrary, he was going back—he was hurrying home as fast as he could go. He was afraid of nothing—no! not of anything. He was so perfectly innocent. . . .

But all the time that he persuaded himself there was no cause for fear, Jean felt the sharp spur of a dread he could not surmount pressing him forward.

Oh, yes!—of course he was innocent! But all his thoughts had not been innocent during the murderous night he had passed in the Bois de Boulogne. Ah, God!—if they could only know how many times that night he had wished he could avenge himself upon his cousin for his hard-heartedness!

His poor cousin! He grieved for him with his whole heart, and, in the ardor of his gratitude and his regret for him, he said to himself: "When I have proved that they have made a great mistake in suspecting me, I shall not be sorry to have endured the shame of having been suspected. It will be an expiation. I shall have suffered for his sake. He will know it where he now is in the skies. It will be part payment of the debt I owe him."

Thus it will be seen that Jean was of the race of men whose vocation it is to be martyrs.

When he reached the main street of Boulogne, where his own house was, he saw nothing unusual about the place, no crowd before the door, no sign of evil augury; he sighed, and walked on more slowly.

The window of the *entre sol* was open. Emilienne, who was doing her morning's work, was shaking something out of it. Perhaps she was making a signal to somebody.

In a few steps he was in his shop. He had not strength to cross it and to run up-stairs. He stopped and flung himself on a half-finished chair.

The sound of the shop-bell, and the noise he made in entering, brought down Emilienne.

She thought it was a customer. Customers had been expected ever since they were relieved from fears of bankruptcy.

She paused at the foot of the staircase, suddenly seized with

alarm on seeing her husband in such a state of weariness and emotion.

Had the joy of the night before been false? Had fresh debts been discovered? Had they got to give back the two thousand francs? Did Pierre Mortier desire to undo his good action?

She dared not ask questions. Jean dared not speak. They looked tremblingly at each other with that vague smile seen on the faces of those who fall back inevitably into misfortune, and who have no way to protest against their fate but by bravado.

At last Emilienne, the braver of the two, asked:

"What has happened?"

"He is dead!" replied her husband, hoarsely.

"Who? Cousin Pierre—dead? Did he die suddenly?"

"No; he was murdered!"

Emilienne had one moment—I will not say of doubt, for that would have made her guilty of mistrusting her husband, but—of hesitation.

"Who told you?"

"The clerks in the office."

"Who killed him?"

"They don't know."

"A robber?"

"Probably."

"How did any one know he had any money?"

"Ah! you ask more than I can tell you."

"Poor man! What a pity!"

"Yes, indeed—what a pity! what a pity!"

Jean gave a start. He heard loud steps in the street. He became deadly pale and looked toward the door.

Emilienne's glance followed his. She too grew pale.

"Why did you come back so fast?" she said, going up to her husband and wiping his damp forehead.

"I wanted to be here . . . first," replied Jean, unfastening the bow of his cravat.

"First?"

"Yes; before—"

He dared not finish his sentence.

"Who do you expect, then?"

"I don't know who; the mayor, the commissaire of police, the gendarmes."

"The gendarmes?" cried Emilienne, putting both hands on his shoulders, and looking him full in the face.

"Yes—the gendarmes. It seems that they are coming to arrest me."

Jean said this simply and almost quietly.

Emilienne's eyes dilated. Her mouth trembled so that her words hardly passed her lips.

"They accuse *you* . . . of having killed him?"

"It seems so."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"And of having robbed him?"

"Oh, they may search where they will!"

Jean was falling into a sort of stupor, which alarmed his wife. She shook him.

"Come, Jean, be a man! Don't let yourself be cast down—don't look as if you were guilty, when you are innocent."

It seemed to Jean as if she emphasized these last words.

He rose electrified, and, with an air of pride and confidence, which could never have been assumed by a man guilty of a falsehood, cried:

"Are you not certain of it?"

"Oh, yes, I am!" she answered, upborne by her faith in him, and gazing full, with tender eyes, into the loving honest eyes of her husband—"oh, yes, I am quite certain. You will see what I shall say, if I am called upon to testify. Indeed, don't be afraid, Jean. Every day somebody is accused unjustly; but people are never arrested without some proofs, and what proofs have they against you? None."

"None. You are right. All the same, it gives me a dreadful feeling to think they will be coming here to examine me. . . . Oh! I had rather have a visit from the sheriff. I have not been long at peace. Those two thousand francs, I know, will bring misfortune."

A strange idea suggested itself to him.

Suppose the murderer, finding his address in Pierre Mortier's pocket-book, had been the one to slip the two thousand franc-notes into the envelope so as to direct suspicion to him?

The same idea occurred, at the same moment, to his wife. Where strong love exists, such simultaneous thoughts not unfrequently arise.

Emilienne suddenly went toward the stairs.

"Where are you going?" asked Jean.

"To burn that envelope."

"No; on the contrary, we must keep it. It will prove how I got two thousand francs."

Emilienne shook her head.

"Did you hear the news at the notary's?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps it is not true—perhaps they were playing a joke upon you."

"No. Besides, that explains why we expected him in vain all yesterday."

"It explains nothing," replied Emilienne, recurring to the notion that they had both had, and both concealed, a few moments ago, "for, if he did not send you those notes himself, we might have expected him a long while."

"He sent them—I am certain of it. I know he did. I want to feel grateful to him for sending them, whatever happens to me."

At this moment the little girl, who had been left alone in their rooms up-stairs, and had not been able to follow her mother, began to come down.

They heard her two little feet in her new shoes come pit-a-pat, each little foot joining the other upon every stair; she was humming a little song, and putting her doll to sleep.

The upholsterer's feelings suddenly overpowered him.

"Must she be made unhappy again, poor little thing? She has been so bright since yesterday! Go to her. Take her up-stairs; if they come—"

"If they come, here we all are. We will not leave you."

And turning toward the stairs, Emilienne said, motherly—that is, in a tone of quiet softness, which concealed her anguish:

"Florence, here is papa come back! Come down and kiss him."

The child, at this, descended the last steps quickly and ran up to her father.

"Where is he?" she asked, looking round.

She was expecting to see Cousin Pierre, about whose coming they had all been talking since the night before.

She fancied they were hiding him to give her a surprise.

"He is not coming," said her mother.

"Ah!" said the little one, disappointed. She held up a pretty scrap of red velvet to Emilienne, which she had turned into a cloak or a shawl for her doll, to make her worthy to be introduced to Cousin Pierre.

Emilienne smiled, Jean had tears in his eyes.

"He has gone to God," said the upholsterer's wife.

"Ah, yes!" said the child, thinking of her prayer the night before, "I know he has, because I asked God to take care of him."

After several hours of horrible expectation, Jean began to think that Emilienne might have been right when she suggested that Maître Boisselot's clerks were playing a trick on him.

He recalled the whisperings, the smiles and signs, confusedly seen and heard by him during his first visit.

But Jean lost this illusion when, toward the close of the day, three personages who did not give their names, who had no need to explain their right to ask him questions, came into his shop suddenly with their hats on, shut the door behind them, and appeared to take possession.

"Are you Jean Mortier?" asked the most solemn-looking of the visitors, who must have been the commissary from the Paris prefecture of police (the one belonging to Boulogne was doubtless on the watch in the street).

"Yes, monsieur," replied the upholsterer, calmly.

He had had time to collect himself. Besides, his wife and child were at his side, and that kept him from any display of emotion.

"The day before yesterday you and your cousin, Pierre Mortier, met at the office of Maître Boisselot, to hear the reading of a certain will?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You expected a legacy?"

"I hoped so, . . . a little."

"You appeared much disappointed to find that everything had been left to your cousin?"

"I was in despair, . . . that is true."

"You asked him to lend you something, and he roughly refused you?"

"He refused me. I don't know that he was very rough."

"You left the notary's office in his company?"

"Yes, monsieur."



"You went with him—"

"About fifty yards, . . . not more."

"You were seen talking together, and you threatened him?"

"Who says that?"

"Your gestures were observed."

"Yes, I did threaten him. I said that may be I should kill myself, and then he would be sorry. . . . It was mean of me to say that, but that was all I said."

"You did not follow him?"

"No, monsieur."

"Where did you go when you left him?"

Jean suddenly became embarrassed. He was ashamed to confess how broken-down he had been, and to tell these men of his despair and his dread of going back to his own home.

Emilienne came boldly to the rescue.

"He is ashamed to tell you, monsieur, that he was so discouraged that he spent all night wandering about, weeping and lamenting, doubtful if I were brave enough to bear the news he would bring home with him, and leaving me to pass a night of terrible anxiety."

"Yes. We know that already from people in the village who saw him come home at early morning."

Jean and Emilienne felt surprised that the neighbors had been examined before any questions were put to them.

The examination was continued:

"Where did you pass the night?"

"In the Bois."

This reply greatly astonished the commissary. He had not expected so decided and ready an answer.

"Do you know," he resumed, where your cousin went when he parted from you?"

"Somewhere in Paris, for he sent me a letter with the Paris post-mark."

"What! did he write to you after he left you?"

Jean explained that he had not written to him, but that he had sent him, in an envelope, two thousand francs. He related how it happened that the address on the envelope was in his own handwriting.

The commissary had no doubt learned, through his preliminary inquiries in the neighborhood, that Jean, the day before, at the sec-

ond delivery of letters, had received two bank-notes, and had used them to pay his creditors.

Before coming to his house he had also received the testimony of the butcher, who, with an effusion that was damaging to those in whom he took an interest, told all about the young couple's poverty, the state of prostration in which Jean had returned home, and his sudden change of demeanor the next day.

The commissary, therefore, knew that the upholsterer had told everybody he had received a letter. The circumstance of the address, however, seemed to throw light on some point that had been obscure to him.

"What have you done with the envelope? Torn it up? Burned it?"

"No, monsieur; I kept it as something sacred—a souvenir of my cousin's good action.—Go and fetch it, Emilienne."

The wife, who was standing, pale and resolute, her little girl in front of her, held where she stood by a light touch with the ends of her fingers, made as if she would put Florence aside, but the commissary stopped her.

"There is no need. We can see it later."

Then, turning to Jean—

"So you tell me you passed the night in the Bois de Boulogne?"

"I can swear it."

"Do you know that your cousin, Pierre Mortier—"

"Has been murdered? Yes, monsieur."

The commissary made a movement, and Emilienne frowned. The official thought the upholsterer absolutely impudent; his wife thought him too confident in the power of his innocence.

"How did you know of his misfortune?"

"This morning, from the clerks of Monsieur Boisselot."

"What took you this morning to the notary's?"

"I wanted my cousin's address. From the moment I received the two thousand francs I felt intensely grateful to him. I had been expecting him all yesterday. We had got up a little dinner for him. I wanted to know where he was staying in Paris. That was what took me to the notary's, and there I learned that he had been murdered. . . . I was terribly grieved. They told me, also, that I was wanted—that I might be suspected; and so, because I do not fear being accused, I came home as quickly as possible to my wife and

little girl, and here you find me, monsieur. Do I look like a murderer? Do we look like a family of highway robbers? Look at us."

Jean pointed to his wife, pale, but smiling proudly, and to his little girl, who was looking up innocently at the officers of justice, without understanding what was going on. He himself looked resolute and true. He had spoken calmly, but his voice had that vibration that comes from deep feeling.

The commissary was not insensible to what he saw before him. But his feelings were divided between a humane desire to believe in what seemed true, and the anxiety of an official not to be taken in by any species of acting.

Indeed, the *mise en scène* in this case was so perfect that it rather deterred him from believing in its reality.

"Do you know," said he, after a moment's silence, "where your cousin was murdered?"

"No, monsieur."

"In the Bois de Boulogne; near here."

Jean could not prevent his teeth from chattering, and immediately after a pain in his head made him pass his hand over his hair.

Emilienne shut her mouth tight to keep back a sigh. The fear that had been passing off came back stronger than ever. Her hand leaned heavily upon her little girl.

"In the Bois!" stammered Jean. "In the Bois—near here! Ah! now I comprehend. He was coming to see us."

"In the middle of the night? That is very improbable."

"He may have set out before it was dark."

"No; for we followed him up in Paris till one o'clock in the morning."

"Then I don't understand it," murmured the upholsterer, who began to feel his brain reel.

"You received two thousand francs?" continued the commissary of police.

"Yes, monsieur—two thousand."

"Do you know how much your cousin had in his pocket-book when he left the notary's?"

"Yes, twenty-five thousand francs."

The commissary looked round him, saw a little office desk covered with Jean Mortier's account-books. He pointed it out to those under him.

They asked for the keys of the different drawers.

"They are all in the locks," replied Emilienne; "you will find nothing there but sheriff's papers."

And in truth, though the police officers searched the drawers, pulled them out, and turned them over, they could find nothing but protested notes, writs, and judgments.

The search of the house was thus begun, and it went on.

Jean and Emilienne assisted in it eagerly. The cross-examination being now suspended, they had the chance to think, to hope that the commissary would declare himself satisfied—in other words, mistaken. The police could not, of course, find twenty-three thousand francs in the house. In five minutes they might hope to get rid of them.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE HAMMER.

THEY went up into the rooms above.

The few kitchen-utensils, the closets, the drawer in the little kitchen table were carefully examined, turned out, and emptied. Nothing was found.

In the room which was used for a dining-room their search was equally without result.

In the bedchamber the commissary first turned his attention to the looking-glass, where he saw a paper stuck in the frame. He took the envelope and examined it carefully.

The post-mark indicated that it had been sent from an office in the Place de la Madeleine.

This did not exonerate Jean Mortier. He had had plenty of time, between the hour when the murder had been probably committed and the time of his return to his own house in Boulogne, to go back into Paris and there fling this envelope into a letter-box.

The commissary, who was an adept in his vocation, but who knew how many deceptive appearances there may be in such a case, and did not therefore want to jump to a conclusion, made the upholsterer go over again all the explanations he had already given him relative to his handwriting on the address of the envelope. He

was not sorry to have the opportunity of comparing this second account with the first.

So Jean had to tell all over again how, not finding one of his own cards in his pockets, he had taken from the notary's desk the first bit of paper that came to hand to write his address upon.

"When did you do that?" asked the commissary.

"While we were waiting for Maître Boisselot."

"It was, then, before the will was read?"

"Yes; exactly," replied Jean, with a sigh of relief as he said so.

The way in which the reply was made seemed to the commissary somewhat to clear the atmosphere.

"Then, when you wrote down this address, you did not know that the will had left you nothing?"

"I did not know it, monsieur."

"But you were afraid it might?"

"I had reason, on the contrary, to think that what our uncle left would be shared between us. I did not think I should have been sent for for nothing."

Did not the commissary of police feel the influence of these frank, clear declarations, of this poor home so honest in its poverty, of Emilienne's proud courage, and the sweetness of the little girl, who thought they were talking too long with her papa?

But with the skepticism of a police spy who has been caught before in his life barking up the wrong tree, he said to himself that appearances in a criminal investigation are reasons, not for believing a man innocent, but for making closer scrutiny into the affair.

Yet the commissary began to look less sternly at Jean Mortier, and his manner seemed to show that he regretted the disturbance made by his search, . . . unless, indeed, his sudden change of deportment were only a snare.

"Did the notary's clerks see you write your address on the envelope?"

"I don't know. They might, for they seem to have been able to hear everything."

"That is a very important point. You affirm, at any rate, that the address was written by you in Maître Boisselot's office, on an envelope belonging to Maître Boisselot?"

"I do affirm it."

"We will see if your statement can be corroborated, . . . though pretty nearly all envelopes are alike."

The commissary of police kept turning and returning the envelope in his fingers.

Since they came into the bedchamber the two underlings had been opening the closets, searching the drawers, fumbling in the clothes, and turning over the bed and linen.

"Well," said the commissary, "so you don't find anything?"

"Nothing," replied one of them, "except this," and he held out the little upholstering hammer that Jean Mortier, the reader will remember, had, when he came up-stairs on his return, flung on the bureau.

The commissary of police was at once struck by the appearance of this tool, which he had not thought of, and which was distinguished, by its peculiar shape, from the hammers commonly used in upholstery.

It had dried dirt on it, and on its sharp, bright edges a little rust was beginning to show.

Had it fallen from the pocket of Jean's apron when he flung himself on the ground in one of the thickets of the Bois? Had Jean, in his fever and excitement, struck the earth with it? Had he tried to mark out on the ground, when he had lain down on it in his grief, the outlines of a tomb?

"Is this hammer yours?" asked the commissary, pleasantly. But pleasantness from such people is always to be suspected.

"Yes, monsieur. It was a present from my fellow-workmen."

"Did you take it to the notary's?"

"Certainly."

"It was a singular thing to do. Was it by way of precaution or from carelessness?"

"It was not either. I had been working all the morning at a rich gentleman's house at Saint-James. You can go there yourself and find out if I am telling you the truth. . . . I worked up to the hour when I had to leave for my appointment. I am rather proud of this steel hammer, and I take it when I go to my best customers. I left my other tools at the house, but I carried the hammer, not liking to run the risk of losing it, and that is why I had it with me at Maître Boisselot's."

"What explanation can you give as to its being stained with mud and rust?"

"Ah! I had more mud than that on my clothes. As for the rust, it must be from the dampness of the grass as it lay on the ground."

I have not had time to clean it. Yesterday I was so anxious, and to-day I have been so worried. *Ah, ça !* are you fancying, Monsieur le Commissaire, that I could possibly have used this little hammer as a pick-axe to make a hole in the ground to hide my treasure in ? ”

The commissary had resumed his sternness. He was beginning to feel convinced of Jean's guilt, but he was sorry to find himself so. He paused before he answered. The attentive, anxious eyes of Emilienne, and the sight of the little girl, laughing softly as she played with her new doll, troubled his reasoning.

However, he answered, very gravely :

“ There may be other uses made of a little hammer, besides picking a hole in the ground with it. ”

“ What ? ”

“ Why—striking. ”

The commissary of police made the same gesture Jean himself had made in the private room of the notary, and he called it to mind at once.

“ Oh, as to that, ” he murmured, in spite of his remembrance, “ that is impossible. ”

This contradiction provoked the commissary of police. He drew back and said, dryly, and in a stern voice :

“ The unfortunate man was knocked down by several blows upon his temples made by some instrument which we have had great difficulty in determining, but which is probably this very thing. The body bears marks which may probably fit this hammer. You will not escape being confronted with the corpse of Pierre Mortier. ”

Emilienne came forward and tremblingly placed herself between the commissary and her husband.

The former, with some lingering, last trace of politeness, said to her, handing the hammer as he spoke to one of his underlings :

“ My duty, madame, is to arrest your husband. ”

Emilienne gave a sort of sharp laugh, one of the spasms of suffering.

“ Arrest him ! ” she cried. “ What for ? Because he has an upholsterer's hammer ? ”

“ No ; because he has a hammer of an unusual shape, which is not like those generally used by upholsterers. ”

“ Well, and what of that ? Because he has been so unfortunate as to be disinherited ? Or because his cousin had pity on him ? ”

The commissary did not answer; he looked at one of his subordinates. This man opened the window, and made a quick sign to some men who were waiting in the street to assist him in case of an arrest.

Jean made no protest. He tried to collect his faculties. He began vaguely to perceive that every word he said strengthened the suspicions against him. He thought it all absurd, and wished to think out the reason of so fatal an absurdity.

Emilienne endeavored to control the tumult of her grief. Almost any other woman would have wept, implored, held out her arms to the commissary; but she wanted to reason with him.

"*Voyons, monsieur,*" she said, recovering her presence of mind; "it is not possible you can mean to arrest my husband thus without knowing more. . . . The authorities ought to make every inquiry. . . . I will work with you. Oh, we shall not run away! Don't be afraid. You will find us here when wanted. But it is horrible to carry off a man, who has to gain his bread by work, from his workshop and his wife and child. Just think, monsieur, what will become of his poor little daughter?"

Emilienne's voice quavered in spite of herself.

The commissary of police, by a gesture, intimated that he could not help it.

The young wife became more urgent.

"You surely can distinguish between good men and bad men. See, monsieur—look thoroughly at us."

"Madame, it is my duty to make but one inquiry. I was sent here to verify certain facts which agree with our first information. . . . My duty is simply to put into the hands of my superiors matters that they will deal with subsequently. . . . A man is not necessarily guilty because he is arrested. I have arrested honest men before now when appearances were against them. . . . All that your husband says may possibly be true; but you can see yourself that there is a strong chain of evidence against him. . . . In the notary's office he has angry words with his cousin. He entreats him for assistance; . . . he goes out with him in a high state of exasperation, or of great grief, which is remarked upon by those who see them. They disappear from view at the same time, both apparently walking on together. It is true that Pierre Mortier was alone during the evening in Paris; . . . that he went to a fashionable



restaurant to supper; and we have no evidence that your husband was seen in his company; but when a man has laid his plans to lie in wait for another man, of course he is careful. . . . What was Jean Mortier, your husband, doing from five o'clock in the evening till six o'clock in the morning? He says he was wandering in the Bois de Boulogne. Now, it was in that very Bois—probably about two o'clock in the morning—that Pierre Mortier was murdered, not far from this spot. What was the deceased doing in the neighborhood of the village of Boulogne, unless some one had enticed him thither; and who would have enticed him except the kinsman, who may have met him on the boulevard, and who, finding him half-drunk, may have been able easily to persuade him to accompany him? The next day, in an envelope directed in your husband's own handwriting, two thousand francs reach you by post at the very hour you need them. Whence came this money? No doubt it was highly imprudent—an imprudence that might almost pass for the frankness of an innocent man—to have allowed people to see that sum of money; but it would have been as perilous, and yet more difficult, not to produce it till the sheriff came. The circumstance, yet to be verified, of the address having been written at the notary's, will not alter the case. That envelope was made use of because it happened to be in the pocket-book together with the bank-notes. If everything else were favorable, that might be passed over. But this hammer, which differs from the ordinary upholsterer's hammer, seems to me to correspond exactly with the wounds upon the victim's skull."

Jean listened stupefied, shrinking into himself as if to avoid being entangled in the meshes of these apparent proofs.

Emilienne, with her hands clasped on her breast, and her eyes steadily fixed upon the commissary, followed every word of his argument in order to find some point she could disprove.

"If my husband had killed any one with that hammer, do you suppose," she said, "that he would have placed it there in full view on my bureau? And, while expecting your arrival, would he not have told me to polish off this rust, which I have no fear of, for I swear to you I know it is not blood?"

"No—no! I am no murderer," added Jean Mortier, shaking his head.

"I hope not," said the commissary of police, "but I have explained to you my duty. Do not force me to use my rights."

The subordinates placed themselves one on each side of the upholsterer.

"I submit, monsieur," he said; "you can take me where you will. There will be no need to use force."

"Jean!" cried Emilienne, throwing her arms round him, and weeping bitterly.

The little girl began to understand that her brief time of laughter and of happiness had passed away, and that the time to weep had come back once more. She had let go of her doll and seized her papa's hand.

Jean Mortier pressed a long kiss on his wife's forehead.

"Be brave," he said to her gently. "If people in the village see you cry, they may say we were afraid of the examination."

"And I am afraid," sobbed Emilienne. "Men have to be your judges."

"Yes, but though they may make me a victim, they can not make me a criminal. Come, since you know that I am worthy to be your husband, and worthy to be the father of our little girl, I can risk the rest. Besides, as Monsieur the Commissary said just now, a man is not guilty because he has been arrested—"

Emilienne looked at her husband, and admired him in spite of her despair. Never had she loved him so dearly; or, rather, it seemed to her that now, for the first time, love fully revealed itself and shone forth in all its power. She felt that he was innocent, ill-treated, but of a noble spirit; a beauty she had never before appreciated in him shone in his face and person. He seemed to her transfigured by a glory emanating from his soul.

"You are right," she said, "you give me back the lesson I taught you. Tears are of no use—they only spoil the eyes; and I need mine. Take him, monsieur; only I implore you, and it is the only favor I ask, tell me, for charity's sake, what is known of the doings of our Cousin Pierre after he parted from my husband. How do you know he went somewhere to supper?—that he was drunk? Where did he sup? You have made your inquiries; you have found out nothing, . . . but I shall!"

The commissary of police could not refuse the brave woman the information she demanded. He told her all that the agent of police had already related to Madame de Monterey; that on the body of Pierre Mortier they had found the card of a restaurant, and he did

not omit to tell her of the women who had supped at the next table to Pierre.

"And why did you not arrest them?" she asked suddenly.

And she added, with the cruelty of an honest woman:

"You did not need to be particular with creatures of that kind!"

"There was nothing against them."

"Ah! you took their word for it—you believed them—though they live by lying. Is that all?"

The commissary of police then told her of the fashionable gentlemen from the club. Emilienne dared not insist on their precautionary arrest, but something within her cried out that these dissipated fast livers ought to be suspected quite as soon as a man of irreproachable character, like her husband.

"Thank you," said she. "To-morrow I will go and see those women and those gentlemen of fashion. . . . Jean, this will keep me busy while you are away. Do not be anxious, you will not be gone long. Kiss your daughter, and think of her more than of me. That thought will make you strong."

Jean, the muscles of whose face were working in a way he tried to hinder by a smile, took his little girl in his arms, and, unwilling to be less heroic than his wife, said to Florence:

"Are you going to be very good while I am away?"

"Yes, papa."

"And you will never cry?"

The little girl's heart was very full, but she answered bravely:

"No—never."

"When I come home I will bring you a doll, prettier than the one I gave you yesterday."

Florence looked at him with eager eyes.

"Don't say anything more to her," said Emilienne, who was afraid that what he said might overcome the child's feelings.

Then, taking her back from her father's arms, she said:

"We will both pray for you, *mon ami*."

"Your prayers brought little good to our cousin."

"One must never be weary of waiting for an answer from the good God. I *am* waiting—for indeed we suffer as much as we can bear."

She said that firmly, and drew back to let Jean go down-stairs between the two police agents, preceded by the commissary.

When they reached the shop they saw, through the windows, a

hackney-coach standing before the door, which no doubt had been brought from Paris. The Boulogne commissary of police got out of it with a gendarme and opened the door.

Emilienne had a sudden flash of indignation in her eyes.

"Ah, gentlemen!" she said, "you had no need to look for proof to justify your arrest; you had made up your minds beforehand!"

Then turning to the Boulogne commissary of police whom she knew, and who knew her, she said:

"Monsieur Gauthier, could not *you* have answered for us?"

The commissary did not reply, but his downcast look showed the unhappy woman how strong is suspicion even when rapidly formed.

She made no protest.

Jean left his own home bravely.

In the street a few neighbors drew near the carriage. The butcher, among others, was there. He had testified conscientiously, but under the impression that the kindest thing he could do was to excite pity for Jean Mortier; and he had no suspicion that all the things he dwelt on most persistently strengthened the case against him.

"I will ask you to be kind to my wife and child," said Jean, as he pressed his hand with energy.

"No need to ask that, neighbor. And, besides, you will not stay long, I hope, in Paris. It will be only taking a little drive."

Jean raised his eyes to heaven.

"Who knows?" he said.

The carriage set out. Emilienne had made no effort to detain it; nor had she sprung forward to give one last kiss to her husband. Her *role* was to be that of a Stoic, and it was now beginning. She wanted to bear her testimony to Jean's innocence before those who had imprudently said that which had told against him. The wife's bearing should bear witness for her husband. She would have plenty of time to weep in the night-watches.

Jean, on his part, had felt it best to hide the spectacle of his great love, and had not been willing to gratify spectators by the sight of a tearful separation from his wife and child. He knew that, however he and Emilienne might be parted, they would be really one, and that in thought and feeling they would be united in spite of distance or stone walls.

A few persons, who were curious, remained standing beside

Madame Mortier as the carriage drove away. When it turned at the end of the street, Emilienne said softly to a young man near her :

"Would you be so kind as to help me to put up the shutters?"

Then, turning toward the butcher, she said :

"We were too proud of our good fortune, neighbor. Because we paid our debts like honest people, we are now supposed to be criminals."

"Ah! Madame Mortier."

"Yes, we made too great a display of our two thousand francs! Now, when we return to being poor—poorer than ever—perhaps people will begin to believe that we have not stolen twenty-five thousand francs from our poor cousin. . . ."

This mention of twenty-five thousand francs caused some astonishment.

The neighbors all believed husband and wife to be innocent. But there was a disposition to hold them in more respect when it was found that they were suspected of such an imposing abstraction. They were not mere ordinary innocent people, since they were suspected of having stolen such an extraordinary sum!

The shutters were put up before the windows. Emilienne thanked her neighbors, and then, retiring with her little girl, she closed the door.

Alone in the dark recesses of the shop, she leaned against a great piece of furniture, put her hands up to her face, and wept with anger, with utter abandonment, but silently, for fear she should be heard by her little girl. Florence was pressing up against her mother's knees that she might not be frightened in the dark, and, though she had one foot on her doll, which had fallen on the floor, she did not dare to pick it up, being so afraid in that black shop, which seemed to her a hole—dark, deep, and dreadful—where they all three were swallowed up and would come out into the light no more.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## IN THE ASHES.

WHILE Jean Mortier, who had passed his night in the model prison of Mazas, was being carried to the morgue to be confronted with the body of the man he was supposed to have murdered, and who bore well the first shock of what is a remnant of the old ordeal, the appeal to the judgment of God—an appeal as uncertain, as liable to err as man's judgments—we will see what was passing in the little hotel in the Rue d'Anjou.

Madame de Monterey, after a wakeful night, more painful than any of the many she had passed, sent away her son, who, as we know, came every morning to pass an hour or two playing in her chamber, and, after having dressed herself hurriedly, with strong determination in her face and eyes (though her heart beat so that it almost stifled her), she went to the chamber of her husband.

She was resolved to have a clear explanation with him.

She, too, without any idea of what was taking place elsewhere, without any suspicion of the strange parallel between the fate of two beings wholly unknown to each other, unlike in everything except in torture and in anguish, wanted to be confronted with a spirit. She would make her husband stand face to face with his own conscience, and this time she would, at any cost, get at the truth, whatever that truth cost her.

She thought the night had probably been as trying to Gaston as to herself, . . . only she had strengthened her soul during her hours of wakefulness, while she felt very certain Gaston's had lost strength.

She would find him, she thought, as she had often found him after those long evenings—those fatal nights of play—languid, but agitated at intervals by nervous terrors, pale, with restless eyes, with no fixed resolution, absent-minded, not having made even the first attempt to know what he felt himself, or to rehearse the falsehoods which that day he would wear.

If those fearful suspicions which now poisoned everything for Gabrielle were to be changed to certainties, she thought she could survive the loss of happiness, though called to a sacrifice the extent

of which she could not foresee. What she dreaded was something vague, confused, and indistinct, which may be would leave crime unpunished by the laws of men, though expiated in the sight of Heaven before the great invisible Judge.

The honor of the name she bore, the happiness of her son, the repentance and the very life of her husband, were what she had to save; and at the same time she felt that it must be her task to expiate the crime, and that she must not make herself an accomplice in it by too much tenderness.

After knocking at the door and opening it, she was very much astonished not to find Gaston in his room. He had been out an hour or two, apparently. The bed was tumbled, which proved that he had lain down in it. But had he slept? Very uneasy, her first thought was that he had made his escape, and then she thought of suicide.

He had made no preparations for any journey. He had left no writing behind him. She saw nothing of the tragical orderliness in which some men are impelled to leave everything when premeditating an act of desperation; nor did she see anything of the disorder of a man out of his mind, or of one who is running away from his home.

Where could he have gone so early?

The day before, after the detective's visit and the incident of the cane that he had destroyed, he had shut himself up in his room so long that when he reappeared at dinner-time he had to feign a bad headache before the servants and his son, to account for his melancholy and his indolence, his lack of appetite, and his retirement at ten o'clock to his own room. Gabrielle had expected to see him play the same farce this morning. His being out completely puzzled her.

She took advantage of it, however, to do what she had never dared to do before during her husband's absence—that is, she made a thorough search in his sitting-room and chamber.

It was a double trial. While with fear and trembling she sought for proofs of what would bring her a new, intolerable grief, she was passing in review all the days of her life as she looked over each piece of furniture.

But if the loving, self-sacrificing, and intelligent wife was saddened and humiliated by the shabby and faded luxury about her, which retained no longer any trace of the taste she had tried to im-

part to everything when the rooms were fitted up by her for her husband, if she was disgusted by the trash that strewed the rooms he occupied ; if she was shocked at finding wretched novels, silly and realistic, with only half their leaves cut, tossing about among cigars and gloves, and at all the things which testified to Gaston's mental indolence—she had, at any rate, the satisfaction of finding nothing whatever which, by any effort of the imagination, could be made to connect itself with the catastrophe of which the detective had given her the details.

The police might come, but would be able to find nothing suspicious. She could not even discover one of those bank-notes that Gaston had flourished in his hands the day before. He probably had carried off with him all those that remained, for in the drawers, which all had their keys in their locks, search as she would she could find no paper money, but only a little small change.

Whether this expedition into her husband's rooms had suggested to her another precaution, or whether this visit was but the preliminary step to others, is uncertain ; but Gabrielle, in leaving Monsieur de Monterey's chamber, went straight to the *salon*.

Before she could open the door, Roger came out of it. The child had probably been doing something naughty. He gave a little cry of surprise on seeing her, and his face turned red.

But his mother, who had not expected to come across him, blushed too, and was more anxious to hide her own air of anxiety and watchfulness from the innocent, sharp eyes that were looking up at her, than to question the child as to what he had been doing.

"What ! have not you gone to your governess ?" she said, with a little laugh.

"I'm going, . . . but I forgot to get something," said the little boy, with a laugh strangely like that of his mother.

"What was it you forgot ?"

He put his fingers in his curls, then, lifting his face with the boldness of a little tyrant who knows he will be forgiven anything, he said :

"I forgot to kiss you."

"Oh, what a fib ! You kissed me not long ago."

"No ; not so often as yesterday. I have not given you as many kisses as you ought to have."

"Did you think I was in the *salon* ?"

"Why, yes."



His mother bent down lovingly, and let him give her on her cheeks two hearty kisses; he gave them in all sincerity, yet in another sense they were untrue.

And she, too, poor woman, was also deceiving her own child.

She went into the *salon* and shut the door behind her, though she did not choose to lock it. She rushed to the fireplace.

The man-servant had not yet laid the fire for the day. Two chunks of wood, burned out the night before, had parted in the middle or been separated, and their sharp ends stood up black and gray by the fire-dogs.

Gabrielle picked up the tongs, knelt down before the hearth, and began to search among the ashes.

It seemed to her that some one had been there before her. She could see marks, as if made by a rake, but which might also have been made by fingers, among the fragments of charred wood, and the ashes had been scattered all over the white marble of the hearth.

Who could have been there before Gabrielle? Who but she would have wanted to find—to hide—the handle of the burned cane which was so like a hammer?

Possibly it was only the servant, who had raked down the fire, and lifted the burned brands, by way of preparation for putting on a new back-log. She had better make haste to search before he came back; and Madame de Monterey, with the shovel and tongs, moved the ashes about gently, so as to make no noise.

The stick-part of the cane had been entirely consumed. Gabrielle found the little ferule from the end of it, but, measuring by her memory the length of the cane, she did not find, on the other side of the hearth, the corresponding steel handle—that handle that she so well knew; that she herself had chosen because it was so uncommon, and of which Gaston had always seemed to be very fond.

She searched for a quarter of an hour, at first with precaution, then impatiently, angrily, furiously. She raised a cloud of light gray dust around her. Soon (for using the tongs tired her hands) she began groping with her own delicate white fingers in the ashes, which were not yet cold.

It was when she was in the midst of this occupation that she heard the door of the *salon* open behind her.

The man-servant entered with an armful of wood. Gabrielle turned toward him.

"Has madame lost anything?" he asked, coming up to her quickly, and laying his wood in the wood-box.

"Yes; . . . a ring."

"If madame will but let me look, I can certainly find it."

She hesitated, thinking how she could refuse.

"Thank you," she said, in a low voice.

She got up and straightened herself. Her hands were dirty; she was ashamed of having been caught doing what she knew to be unsuitable, and humiliated by having said what was untrue.

While the man, methodically, and far better than she could have done, examined the ashes, she was saying to herself, in her credulity and her ignorance:

"Could that bit of steel, when it got red-hot, have melted, or been broken up, or have turned to cinders?"

"I can't find anything," said the servant, still on his knees; "but I will sift the ashes."

"No—never mind. I am not quite sure that I let my ring fall."

"But yet, madame—"

"Besides, monsieur may have picked it up. He was in the *salon* this morning, was he not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then that's it. He must have looked for it before I did; for I suppose it was not you who had been meddling with the ashes?"

Gabrielle felt a cold moisture creep over her as she said this. It would be very imprudent to excite the curiosity of the servant; but anxiety and disappointment seemed to force her to put the question.

"No, madame; it was not me. I have not been in the *salon* before this morning, but monsieur was here nearly an hour."

"Very well. Make a good fire. The air is chilly. I am expecting company."

She left the room. She went to her own chamber and got rid of the traces of the ashes on her fingers. As she did so, she kept saying to herself:

"Gaston was beforehand with me. He was prudent. Ah! wretched, wretched man!"

But, though she said this, she dared not realize the dreadful thing of which she thought her husband might have been guilty.

In some crises it is only possible to think as if one were in a dream, one must put aside the principal subject of thought. Madame de Monterey approved of her husband's having taken these

precautions. She would herself require a presence of mind which many a little circumstance might impair. She had other proofs to seek, and, when found, she must conceal them. If she could only get hold of those bank-notes whose numbers the notary had probably preserved!

She would have liked also to know what the papers said about this mysterious murder. She put on her hat to go out. A ring at the bell, which seemed to her ominous of evil, stopped her. She listened breathlessly.

A chambermaid came in and told her that a man, who had some notes in his hand, was asking for Monsieur de Monterey.

"Notes? What kind of notes?"

She gave the woman no time to reply; she did not wait for an answer.

Without allowing herself a moment to reflect, she ran forward to meet this new blow—this new danger.

In the antechamber she found a sheriff's officer, who presented her with some notes pinned on to protests.

Gabrielle understood at once that these were the notes that Monsieur Henrion was to have settled the day before. How came it that they were not now in his possession?"

"I thought," she stammered, "that all these had been paid."

As she said this, she thought, in her secret soul:

"May be the sheriff recognized the bank-notes offered him as stolen money, and he may have refused them."

It was absurd, of course, but, in such states of mind, small heed is paid to logic, and anything will frighten those who are ready to fear.

"It is true, madame," said the sheriff's officer, "that an old gentleman did come about them to the office yesterday, and I saw him. The notes were then at the acceptor's; I had to go and get them. The gentleman, . . . probably monsieur *votre père* offered to leave the money; but it was not regular for me to take it till the notes could be returned; and, besides, the bill of costs was not made out. To prevent anything going wrong with this gentleman, who did not leave me his address, I came round here this morning. . . . But if it is not convenient, if you will tell me when I may call again, or if you had rather it would wait, . . . it can."

Gabrielle had a spasm of satisfaction, but she concealed her joy under a slight smile.

If *she* paid these notes, there would be no need to use the bank-notes that she mistrusted, and which she had given M. Henrion.

But had she enough money to pay them?

I have already said that the provisions of her marriage contract and Monsieur Henrion's friendship permitted her always to hold a certain sum in reserve in case of emergencies; but this reserve was with her lawyer. Had she in the house, in money saved from her housekeeping expenses, enough to meet these notes? However that might be, she answered the sheriff's officer bravely:

"I will pay you, monsieur, and thank you for being so obliging. How much, exactly, am I to give you?"

The officer had the bill of costs. Gabrielle took it, and hastened to her chamber. With what trembling hands she opened the little coffer where she kept her money! She counted it over quickly, or, rather, she somehow assured herself without counting, that there was there all that was wanted, and in gold!

Shivering, but now with satisfaction and content, and thankful in the remembrance of a peril that had been escaped, she came back, holding to her bosom two handfuls of gold. It seemed to her much better, much nobler, on that day, to pay with gold and not with paper. All bank-notes seemed to her, at that moment, to be tainted with the infamy that infected some of them—they might have come out of the pocket of a thief or a gambler!

"Here is the money, monsieur," she said, with a pleased look, as if she were deeply obliged to the man for getting paid.

She let the gold coins drop one by one from her delicate white hand, which dipped into the other as into a cup of alabaster, into the hands the man held out to her joined together, and which seemed to form a calabash of dark mahogany. She liked counting the pieces as they passed through her fingers.

When the sonorous dropping came to an end—

"Count it," she said, graciously.

"It is useless, madame," replied the sheriff's officer gallantly.

It *was* useless, for he had already counted carefully and rapidly every coin as it passed through the white fingers.

Gabrielle had never received a love-letter, not even from her husband, but she seized the notes that the man held out to her with the emotion of a woman (whether bad or good) who receives back her own letters written in the fullness of her heart to a lover.

"Thank you, monsieur—thank you," she said, with the same tender grace.

Once in her own chamber, she felt an impulse to kiss those dirty, greasy papers. She pressed them in both her hands. They had saved Gaston in a double sense—and they might have been his perdition.

But Gaston, even now, would not be saved, would not be sure of safety, if Monsieur Henrion had used any of the notes given him the day before. She must get them back into her hands immediately. Might it not have chanced that Gabrielle's old friend, having no misgivings about the notes, might by chance have mixed them with others of his own, so that he would not be able to separate them? But the moment he attempted to use them he might find out the truth. If the numbers of the dead man's notes had been published—what then?

Gaston might be compromised by the very ally she would have selected even had she had to make a confession to save him.

Again, monstrous as was the supposition that her husband might be guilty, Madame de Monterey felt less the horror of the suspicion than its danger. She would have plenty of time to abhor the crime and to weep over it after she had shielded the guilty man from public shame and punishment; when she had put the honor of her name and the future of her boy in safety.

She would do all she could in expiation; but first she must provide for her husband's safety. She set at once about that which needed to be first done.

This was undoubtedly, to get immediate possession of the fatal notes.

Gabrielle seemed to be in luck. She did not have to leave her home. Monsieur Henrion rang the outer door-bell ten minutes after the sheriff's man had left her.

He looked rather ashamed of himself, and as if he expected her to scold him. He had been to the sheriff's, and had there learned that the notes had been sent round to Monsieur de Monterey's.

As Gabrielle entered the *salon* where he was waiting for her, he came forward with a deprecating smile.

"Am I too late?"

"Yes," she said, with an arch-smile.

"Then I have another journey to make, and to pay my driver for another hour."

"No—your expeditions are ended, you can send away your carriage. We can have a long talk. . . . I have paid the sheriff's man."

"Ah!—had you money enough?"

"Hadn't I?"

"Yes—housekeeping money."

"No, indeed, money I have saved from housekeeping."

"Allow me to compliment you."

Monsieur Henrion sat down with much satisfaction. The good man of business was in no hurry to pull his pocket-book out of his pocket. Gabrielle was very much afraid he might be thinking of doing something else with the money.

"And so you hoard your savings?" he said, making her a bow.

"I did—I have nothing left now."

"I will help you to economize."

"Yes. But as a beginning give me back what my husband gave you yesterday."

"That is but fair."

Monsieur Henrion opened his pocket-book. It contained a pretty large roll of bank-notes. The old man pulled out several at hap-hazard.

Gabrielle turned pale. But yet she smiled, and said, prettily:

"Are these notes the same that he gave you?"

"Oh! they have the same signature, and are of the same value."

"I want the same."

"But why?"

"Because—"

"That's no reason."

"Listen, my old friend. I am rather superstitious. I want to have the same notes that Gaston won at cards."

"But why?"

"I'd like to purify them in my own way."

Monsieur Henrion smiled in his turn.

"You are right. I'm not the man to stand in the way of your doing a work of charity."

He felt in his pocket-book. After a minute, he said:

"You are luckier than could have been expected. I recollect now that when I took them I folded them in four, and put them in the little inner pocket of my pocket-book. . . . Here they are."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, I give you my word of honor that these are the same. I had no others about me when your husband gave them to me. I put them with my visiting-cards, and I never remembered afterward to take them out. It is lucky for your superstition that I did not use them. I should have been obliged to deceive you by giving you apocryphal bank-notes. If you ever played cards for money, I should advise you to stake these notes; they would bring you good luck."

"*I am a gambler!*" cried Gabrielle; "I am going to take upon me all my husband's bad habits, and I won't leave him one of them! I shall turn gambler, you may be sure."

She took the notes and put them at once in her pocket. She was gay—too gay. But Monsieur Henrion had no way of knowing that her gayety was assumed. He had so long seen her sad, that to him it seemed very natural that happiness with her should be a little exuberant.

"Well, then," he said, in a fatherly way, "I suppose I may feel assured that the reformation lasts."

"Oh, my husband is only to go out in the daytime. . . . He goes out now about the time he used to come in. So you can see there is a total change, a radical revolution."

"I am glad of it. What will you do to prevent backslidings?—for you must expect some."

"We will travel."

"A good idea. Will you leave soon?"

Gabrielle still found herself in luck. Monsieur Henrion had told her so, and she felt it herself. She thought she would take a great risk, play a big card with this partner devoted to her interests, who might even assist her. What worthier, more practical confessor could she ask to hear her sad confession?

"We can not leave immediately," she said, gently turning her head a little on one side, that he might not get a full view of her face.

"What hinders you?"

Gabrielle put her hand over her bosom; she was afraid Monsieur Henrion might see her heart beat.

"Gaston may perhaps be summoned as a witness in a criminal affair."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—a murder."

"A duel?"

"No; a man who was killed for the sake of his money. He had supped an hour or two before his death in the same restaurant as Gaston, . . . as Gaston and his friends."

It had cost Gabrielle a great effort to get out this sentence. It seemed to her that it was long, and yet she wanted to make it longer, as if, if she ended it too soon, the axe would fall on her, in the reply of Monsieur Henrion, before she was ready for the stroke. Nevertheless, she had the courage to look up at him.

Monsieur Henrion exhibited no horror. He seemed to be thinking.

"You are speaking of that affair in the Bois de Boulogne?" he said, quietly.

"Ah! have you heard about it?"

"Yes; it is in all the papers. They are on the track of the murderer."

Gabrielle moved her lips, but not a sound would come.

Monsieur Henrion, after trying to remember something, went on:

"I think this morning's paper said the man had been arrested."

"Arrested!"

If the cry that accompanied this word was not a scream, it was because Gabrielle was too worn out to scream. But her very heart exulted.

Then came another thought.

Arrested! O God, was that why Gaston was away from home? Had her husband been carried off to prison by gendarmes? Could it have been before she was awake, before any one knew of it? And could the search in the ashes—?

She stopped these thoughts.

"Did they say who it was?" she asked, faintly.

The question ill expressed what she desired to know. Monsieur Henrion might misunderstand it. He replied:

"The murderer was an upholsterer in the village of Boulogne, a relation of the victim. He must have knocked him on the head with a hammer—you know those little upholsterer's hammers?"

Gabrielle nodded her head; she knew. She looked down at the ashes which were now glowing red, and which seemed to send back into her cheeks a red reflection; a sudden warmth passed swiftly through her veins. The murderer had been arrested. He was a relation of his victim. They had found the weapon with which the crime had been committed; it was a hammer, a hammer



like that on the handle of a cane, but not that. And so her horrible suspicions had slandered Gaston, and his strange doings had been nothing but the effect produced on a weak, unstable mind, upset by the smallest thing out of the common, by the likeness of his own cane to the murderer's hammer—a chance, a coincidence.

But what a coincidence !

By what singular phenomenon did Gabrielle at that moment seem to feel a consciousness of what was passing in the house of the cousin of the murdered man ? All was so extraordinary that she needed confirmation of the news.

These ideas passed through her mind in less time, assuredly, than I have taken to write them. Then, turning to Monsieur Henrion with a more decided smile, she said :

“ Did you say that an upholsterer committed the murder ? ”

“ Yes ; a poor devil who had expected a legacy, and, having been disappointed, stole the money and killed the legatee.”

“ Have they any proofs ? ”

“ It seems so. The hammer in the first place.”

“ Ah, yes ; the hammer. Could any one be killed with such a weapon ? ”

“ Most things will serve to kill, if you want to kill, dear madame. And then there were bank-notes found in possession of the upholsterer.”

“ Bank-notes ! Were they identified ? ”

Here Gabrielle, though she was beginning to feel reassured, put her hand quickly over her pocket to close the opening and hide more completely the bank-notes Monsieur Henrion had given her.

“ Ah ! you ask me to tell you too much,” replied the old man. “ There is no need to identify bank-notes to find the possession of them suspicious when they have no sort of plausible reason for being found in a man's pocket. I can only tell you what I read in my morning's paper ; . . . but, if you take any interest in the affair—”

“ I only wanted to know if Gaston would be called as a witness.”

“ Witness ? What did he see ? ”

“ I told you. He took supper in the same room with the man who was killed an hour later.”

“ Oh ! if that is all he knows, I should say you might set off immediately.”

“ God grant it ! ”

"How fervently you speak! . . . You are not quite sure then of the cure—or, at least, of the happy convalescence?"

"I am sure of one thing, that I shall put all possible zeal into effecting it."

The conversation after this was only about traveling. Madame de Monterey kept Monsieur Henrion at her side as long as possible, perhaps because he seemed to bring her good fortune, and had given her almost the certainty of being delivered from her terrible fears.

She was sitting near the fire, and gayly, almost in bravado, kept pulling about the brands with the tongs, no longer dreading to strike a bit of iron in the ashes, since the police had laid hands upon the real true murderer and of the very hammer that had done the deed.

When Monsieur Henrion was gone, Gabrielle tried to think over all the things that he had told her, to compare them with her own terrors, and so put an end to her fears. But her thoughts bewildered her.

It seemed to her now that she had been awfully wicked to have thought such things against her husband. To what a pass—to what depravity of wifely solicitude must she have come to conceive such suspicions against Gaston? What! suspect him of murder and robbery because he had come home in a bad humor? Because he had won that night at cards, after losing heavily? Because he had been displeased with her for getting a new stick put to his cane?

If the cane had really served him to commit a murder, surely Gaston would never have brought it home with him, and have hidden it so ill. He might have buried it, thrown it into the Seine, burned it elsewhere.

Nor would he have so readily displayed his roll of bank-notes.

Gabrielle pulled out of her pocket those that had been given back to her.

She fancied she could see they were the same, though she had not taken down their numbers.

Those figures which would determine the verdict of a jury she sat gazing at with a remnant of past fear, without accounting to herself for what she did; since she had now no real reason to dread evil consequences. She pulled out of her other pocket a pretty little memorandum-book bound in Russia leather, in which she was in the habit of taking notes about her housekeeping, and finding necessary

dates. In the little place for memoranda attached to the calendar she wrote down the numbers of the notes, being careful to separate the figures; that is, putting only one figure on each page, and using as many pages as were necessary to complete the number, so that no one might guess what the numbers meant in case any search was made in her house.

That done, she looked defiantly at the notes, rolled them into spills, as she often did with note-paper, and one by one slipped them into the fire in a gap between two glowing logs through which rose a little flame.

"In any case, this is no waste, but a work of piety," she said to herself, with somewhat overstrained enthusiasm. "If they were only won at cards, they deserve to be burned. It is my thank-offering for the reformation of my husband. To-day has begun well."

She carefully picked up all the bits of paper which escaped the conflagration, she put them into the red mouth of the blaze with the tongs, and looked at them as they withered and made little twirls in the flame, which, in another moment, carried them up the chimney.

At luncheon-time Gaston came home in the highest spirits. What a difference from the day before!

His eyes shone, and his face was bright. He walked up to his wife jauntily, *se dandinant*, as the Parisians say—nay, he was almost dancing. He seemed about to hug and kiss her; but, possibly, thinking such a *bourgeois* proceeding not altogether in good taste, he contented himself with taking both her hands and lifting them to his lips.

He seemed so disposed to be frank, that Madame de Monterey did not hesitate to question him:

"Where have you been so early this morning?"

"I went to see my friend Henri des Arbois."

He uttered this name in a sort of triumphal way, as if he had no longer any fear of pronouncing it.

Gabrielle had a slight shiver. This friend of her husband's—this Des Arbois—had been one of the guests at the restaurant supper. To him Gaston had paid the fifteen thousand francs lost at play, and to him he had given fifteen thousand franc-notes.

It frightened her to think that he had been in such a hurry to go and see this man.

"Did he write to you?" she asked.

"No, but I promised to go and see him yesterday; and, besides, I had a presentiment that I had better make the visit."

"To take your revenge?"

"Ah! you naughty woman! Didn't I give you my word that I would never play cards any more?"

"Then you went to talk virtue?"

"I dreamed last night that he was going away. My dream has come true."

"Is he going?"

"Yes, he is gone. I went with him to the station. Indeed, it is like a fairy-story. Two days ago he did not expect anything. A telegram from Pondicherry brought him the news that his uncle—a real, old-fashioned, Indian uncle, whose wealth when he dropped off we were always counting upon at the club—had just died and left him a large fortune. I think he told me he expected three or four millions, without counting the other things, diamonds, elephants, and a palace. Henri packed up at once; he was going off without taking leave of any one. I caught him making his preparations. . . . We laughed at an idea suggested of having his mourning embroidered with precious stones. He is off for Pondicherry. . . . It is a splendid voyage. Do you know he wanted to take me with him? If I had been sure you could have got ready to set off, I might have accepted. I don't know whether he will ever come back. He is quite capable of setting up for a nabob in those parts. I have lost an excellent friend in him; rather given to unpleasant jokes, but a good fellow, after all."

Here Gaston made believe to heave a melancholy sigh. He was not usually very much attached to his associates. The effort to seem grieved at the departure of this man was very evident.

Gabrielle suddenly became genuinely sad, but she did not show her feelings. She was wrong, of course, for des Arbois's departure was another piece of that day's good luck concerning which she had congratulated herself not an hour before.

The traveler would most probably never return. He would carry away with him the suspicious notes, he would spend some of them without taking any notice of their numbers, and the rest would be scattered about India. Whatever might happen, too, Monsieur Henri des Arbois would not be called upon to testify in the trial.

If Gaston had been in peril, he was now almost saved.

Yes, but alas! in order to be sure that he was saved, it was

needful to be sure that he had ever been in danger. For the past hour, Madame de Monterey had believed herself convinced that there never had been any danger.

What made her still anxious when her husband looked so cheerful and well satisfied?

They sat down at table, both making believe to have the appetite that is said to attend on a good conscience.

While the servant, who was waiting on them, chanced to be a moment absent, Gabrielle said to Gaston, without looking at him, and while seeming to be occupied with her son:

"You did not chance, when you were out, to go round to Monsieur Henrion's?"

"To receive a lecture? *Ma foi*, no! I never dreamed of it."

Gaston here tried to hide (but succeeded badly) a slight start; he made a noise on his plate with his knife, and continued:

"I wanted nothing from Monsieur Henrion."

"I thought you might have wanted to ask something about those protested notes that he was to take up for you yesterday."

"Well, I suppose he took them up!"

Gabrielle constrained herself to be cruel.

"Suppose he did not take them up?" she said.

Gaston made a second start of anger or astonishment. He poured out some wine, and drank it slowly. Gabrielle went on, quietly:

"Monsieur Henrion was not the person who paid those notes."

"Who did, then?"

"I did."

"What! did you go to the sheriff's office?"

"No, he sent them here."

"Ah! what had happened?"

"Only a small mistake. Monsieur Henrion could not use the bank-notes you gave him."

"Why not?"

"Because he did not get there in time. They brought the notes here. I had just enough money, and I paid them, in gold."

"You did well, then."

Gaston poured himself out another glass.

"And so," he continued, "Monsieur Henrion owes me the sum of money I gave him?"

"No—he has not got it."

Gaston turned pale again. Gabrielle was not willing to test him further; she said quickly:

"Monsieur Henrion gave me back your notes."

"The same notes?" Gaston could not refrain from asking.

"The same."

"Give them to me."

"Oh! they are quite safe. No one will touch them."

The quick, decided way in which the unhappy woman said this, made Monsieur de Monterey ashamed of himself. He found nothing to say, and went on eating voraciously.

Gabrielle observed him out of the corner of her eye. She could not tell exactly the effect produced by her replies. The servant came back, and Gaston, perceiving some slight omission in the way the table was set, began to scold him.

The luncheon went on and ended without any other incident. Monsieur de Monterey recovered himself; he was gay, and amused himself with his son. Little Roger was also more lively than usual, for in general much talking at table was not allowed him.

He had noticed what his papa had said about elephants, and was questioning Gaston about the countries Monsieur des Arbois was going to see.

Gabrielle took no part in the dialogue, but, as she listened to it and saw how almost natural her husband was, hope seemed to revive in her.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TWO WIVES.

AT the end of luncheon, Gaston, on rising from table, without any apparent purpose, pulled out of his pocket a newspaper, which seemed to take up too much room with his cigar-case, and laid it down before him still folded; then he quietly lighted, with extreme care, the excellent cigar he had selected for himself, and seemed to be making ready to go out.

Gabrielle would not prevent him. The newspaper, which she dared not open while he was there, fixed her attention, and made her wish to be alone.

Monsieur de Monterey desired, no doubt, to demonstrate that he was a free man, and foresaw nothing that could interfere with his liberty. He said to Gabrielle, laughing :

"I have a great mind to take Roger with me."

"Oh, yes—do!" cried the child, jumping up in his chair—"do take me, papa."

Roger was not spoiled by his father. The intelligent little creature, who, for the last two days, had seen a lowering black cloud over the house, was enchanted at the bright gleam of paternal friendliness which was piercing the darkness and bringing them all back into gayety. This proposal to take him out walking was the same thing to him as the promise and the reality of the doll had been to Florence Mortier.

"It is cold," continued Gaston, "but the weather is beautiful for a walk."

Then, turning to his son with an expression less like a father's than a grandfather's, he said :

"I'll take you for a beautiful walk. We will go to the Champs-Élysées."

Gaston, as he said this, was himself undoing his boy's napkin.

"Yes, that's nice. To the Champs-Élysées! I shall see Punch!"

"We will see Punch," repeated the model father.

"We can go and drink some milk in the Bois de Boulogne," added the child, encouraged to go further.

Gabrielle, who had been listening to them with a half-smile, giving the same loving glance to both her children, started at these words.

Gaston sucked his cigar, and said, with rather a forced laugh :

"We can go to the Bois de Boulogne, if you like. But this is not the time of year to drink milk there."

The boy ran and kissed his mother, whose formal permission had to be first obtained, but Gabrielle readily gave it.

It only took a few minutes to make the needful changes in Roger's dress that he might be fit to accompany his father; and then Gaston, very proud of himself in his new rôle, which was one in which he was by no means *blasé*, went off, holding his little son by the hand.

Gabrielle had had no hesitation about letting her husband leave her. Paris was no longer a dangerous place for him. Full of her

new confidence, notwithstanding some obstinate resistance in her heart, she would have let her gambler go back even to the card-table, so happy was she to feel sure that he was not guilty—so glad was she to know that his worst vice was love of play.

As soon as she found herself alone, she seized the newspaper, ran to the *salon*, flung herself into an easy-chair before the fire, and searched for the paragraphs she was anxious to find.

She had no need to search long. By a happy chance the paper was folded so as to leave on the outside part of the sheet the various facts on which she wished for information.

Monsieur Henrion had been right. The paper was full of the murder; all Paris was talking about it. It announced that, thanks to the prompt measures taken by the law, or rather by the police, the murderer had been arrested and committed to Mazas, and that morning would be probably confronted with the body of his victim. He was an upholsterer living at Boulogne, a relation of the deceased. They mentioned the disappointment he had suffered relative to the inheritance, which had all fallen to the man who had been murdered. At his house a sum of money in bank-notes had been found, which had been part of the sum received by Pierre, and, what was still greater proof, they had found the hammer which had probably been used to commit the deed.

The paper which boasted of the most correct information, added that its reporter had been allowed to see the hammer. It described it; it explained that it was a kind of hammer used only by upholsterers. It added that it was thought probable it would correspond with the wounds in the skull, as described in the report of the doctors.

Gabrielle read this article several times over. There was no possibility of mistake; there it was in plain print. Nobody could have had all these details inserted only to mislead her. It was the truth.

She was amazed that it did not make her more happy. She was sure she ought to be happy. What further doubt could remain?

It seemed as if she could not concentrate her attention on the columns of the newspaper.

In vain she saw, in vain she weighed the words of the announcement. She could not reconcile the discoveries of the police with her own impressions.

But, after all, her grounds of suspicion against her husband had



been so very vague, they had been so swollen by her own imagination, which at all times so easily ran away with her !

Because Gaston had come home with considerable winnings and a broken cane, she had concluded immediately, after the visit of the agent of police, that he, a man in good society, had hidden himself in the Bois de Boulogne, waylaid, knocked down, killed, and robbed a miserable drunkard. It was simply absurd !

The agents of the police had been more reasonable from the first. They had set out to look for the person most interested in the death of the man murdered. The man had been discovered and arrested.

They said in the paper that the man suspected had made admissions. Very likely. As they had evidence enough to bring the deed home to him, he might easily have been induced to make a full confession ; or perhaps it would be postponed till the accumulation of evidence forced him to admit his guilt. After his being confronted with the body, which was announced to take place that day (and which, in fact, had taken place before she read the paper), the man's sense of guilt would no doubt betray him.

"I will send and buy an evening paper," thought Madame Montereau, "it will probably contain an account of what took place at the morgue. . . . Then it will all be over. I will have an explanation with Gaston, and find out why he gave me such a horrible fright."

As she thought thus, Gabrielle was seated before her fire, mending it with the tongs, and still stirring about the ashes, as if looking for something, when suddenly she stopped and put the tongs back in their place.

"I believe I am crazy !" she said to herself. "They have found the hammer that did the deed. There is no use in my finding the other one, or even looking for it."

What agitated her now was, that she felt the singular connection between the circumstance that the man killed had been struck on the head with a hammer, and that her husband, who had had a mere accidental meeting with the deceased for an hour or so, had had any object in hiding his cane, in the first place, and looking for and recovering a hammer of the same description in the ashes.

But, after all, if the murderer were really in prison at Mazas, there was no reason for her to dispute the evidence. All that she had feared was imaginary.

Gabrielle tried to find out the prisoner's name; but the paper did not give it her.

That seemed to her rather alarming.

How would the name have helped her? It could tell her nothing more than what she knew.

And yet this ignorance, or this reserve, worried her. She would have liked to read it in big letters, to engrave it on her memory, to write it on her heart. This fatal name was necessary. Its absence was strange; without it her security was not complete. Why had the police, which puts everything into the papers, not mentioned the man's name, if it were known?

All of a sudden a puff of air, as it were, seemed to come from without, and set the poor wife's former fancies in a glow. She felt a fire raging in her head and in her bosom.

Did it not often happen, when a case was difficult, that the police, the better to get hold of the guilty party, began by putting him off his guard; and, to this end, did it not have paragraphs put into the papers, saying that the author of the crime was in their hands, while all the time they had no clew to him? The criminal, misled by these assurances, often had been known to fall into the snare.

"Ah, my God!" she thought, "if Gaston, mad, reckless, and presumptuous, believing himself safe, should go and compromise himself by his assurance, and so fall into the net laid for him by the police!" What madness it had been to let him go out that afternoon!

Then Gabrielle, carried away by this fear, as if mounted on a hippogriff, made a journey for several hours through clouds that blinded her and took her breath away. It was the strangest, the most unreal expedition.

She fancied that Gaston might be followed in the street, through the Champs-Élysées, to the Bois de Boulogne, if, led by the invisible loadstone which is said to lure criminals to the spot where their crime has been committed, he should venture into that alley in the Bois where the foul deed was done.

Do what she would, she could not free herself. So atrocious a suspicion as the one she had conceived against her husband can not enter the heart of a woman with impunity. It leaves an incurable wound, that even a future knowledge of his innocence does not entirely cure. The possibility of being able to doubt is as painful as doubt itself. Gabrielle made believe that she was shocked at herself

for having suspected Gaston, for having done despite to her own conjugal affection, for having outraged a man of the education and position of Monsieur de Monterey; but from time to time the truth broke in upon her, with an awful sense of justice, that it was her husband who was really to blame for her mistrust, or rather that her suspicion was due to his character—that of a spoiled child, weak till he was forgetful of all dignity, violent when roused by passion, and then oblivious of all propriety.

Gaston and his boy had not been gone an hour before Gabrielle began to feel that their absence had been long, and to get impatient for their return from their walk. She was sorry to have sanctioned it; she was sorry she had not gone with them. She might have been on the lookout for danger; she might have helped them to avoid it. Several times she was tempted to go out, too, to rush after them, to join them, to bring them back; and then she grew ashamed of her anxiety. She punished herself for it by keeping quiet, by obliging herself to wait, to bear her anguish and be still.

By degrees she fell into that stupor that vaguely resembles sleep, and which is really the imperceptible, monotonous fermentation of great mental suffering. She was in this state about twilight, when the man-servant came in and informed her that a woman wanted to speak to her.

"Who is she, and what does she want?" asked Madame de Monterey, languidly.

"She says madame does not know her. She wants to see her for something very particular."

Gabrielle, much surprised, rose from her easy-chair, and, looking at the servant, said:

"Is she a beggar?"

"Oh! no, madame."

Gabrielle felt some impatience at being thus disturbed.

"Ask her to tell you, at least, what she wants to see me for."

"She did not ask for madame at first; it was only when I told her that monsieur was out, and would not be back before dinner, that she asked if madame were in."

An unknown woman asking for Gaston! What was the meaning of that?

Madame de Monterey felt uneasy.

"Tell her to come in," she said, quickly. She rose from her chair, and, while the man went to show in the woman in question,

Gabrielle passed her hands over her hair to smooth its braids, looked at herself eagerly in the glass, to see what she looked like, and to compose her features, and readjusted the waist of her dress, not out of feminine coquetry, nor to produce any effect upon the visitor, but from an instinct of prudence, that she might not be taken off her guard, and as a precaution that she might be armed with everything that tends to self-possession.

The idea that her husband had been asked for awakened her anxiety.

Madame Jean Mortier was shown into the *salon*. She also was well armed. She was dressed carefully and correctly. As we know, she wished to have nothing in her appearance that would plead for pity. On her first entrance, nothing showed that her visit was of grave importance except her pallor. Emilienne was resolved to keep her face from showing suffering, since she was secure in her own certainty of her husband's honor. She was too fully resolved to save him, too proud of their mutual affection, not to be able to force her eyes into a steady gaze, and her mouth to refrain from trembling.

But she had no power to control the blood in her veins. It oppressed her on her chest. And, besides, she herself was not aware that she was so pale.

The moment Gabrielle saw this delicate and pretty woman, very well dressed, and respectable, she was more than ever puzzled, but she was less afraid.

She came forward a few steps to meet Emilienne, with a sort of bend that was not exactly a courtesy.

Emilienne bowed, and forced herself to smile.

"I was told, madame, that you asked for Monsieur de Monterey?" said Gabrielle.

"That is true; but perhaps you, madame, in his absence, could give me the information I am in search of."

Gabrielle made a sign of consent, which meant "Please go on."

The first words seemed difficult to utter. Ever since early morning Emilienne had been speaking and pleading without embarrassment. But Gabrielle's beauty and grace, and, above all, her reserve, which she mistook for a prejudice against herself, frightened her. She did not know how to begin. At last she said, without choosing her words:

"I am Jean Mortier's wife."

This conveyed no information to Gabrielle. Emilienne had supposed that every one in Paris must know her husband's name.

Madame de Monterey, however, without knowing why, felt reassured by the name. It was probably that of one of her husband's creditors. Would she ever get to the end of them? She supposed that she was going to hear of some debt concealed from her. She would pay it, or promise to pay it, and the visit would be over.

She pointed to a chair for Emilienne, and sat down again.

After a short silence, Madame Mortier went on:

"You have probably heard, madame, of the great . . . misfortune that happened two days ago in the Bois de Boulogne?"

Gabrielle had not expected this. She gave a little sound as if of affright, and turned toward her visitor with an eagerness that would have betrayed her if Emilienne had had any reason to attribute her behavior to anything but a natural repugnance to the presence of the wife of a suspected murderer.

She blushed.

"Yes, I have," stammered Madame de Monterey, nervously clasping both arms of her chair,

Emilienne went on in a sadder voice:

"Then you did not know that the man who was killed was named Mortier?"

"No," replied Gabrielle, though her teeth seemed to clatter in her head.

"I am the wife—"

"Of the man who was killed?"

Gabrielle said this in a hoarse voice, leaning back in her chair as she said it.

"No, madame," said Emilienne, finishing her sentence; "of the innocent man accused of having killed his cousin."

By an unconscious movement, stronger than fear, and which resembled sudden sympathy, Gabrielle leaned forward to Emilienne, and drew her arm-chair toward her.

"Innocent!" she said.

"Yes, madame; as innocent as Monsieur de Monterey!"

Gabrielle seemed to smile. She shook her head, and responded with some boldness, moved by the frightful irony of Madame Mortier's words:

"And yet the morning papers were full of minute details of the murder."

"Minute and correct, it is true; but all they say proves nothing."

Gabrielle wanted to hear everything and to discuss it, but she dared not. She felt that it would be wiser to restrain the desire to know which raged within her.

"I do not see," she said slowly and politely, "how we can be of any service to you."

"O *mon Dieu!*" resumed Emilienne, with her voice of gentle grief, but firm with all its gentleness, "you will not, perhaps, be able to help me to make clear to others the truth that now lies hid, and I need no discovery for myself. . . . Only it was my duty to come here, as I have been to other places. If you can not give me any information, I shall, at least, thank you, madame, for the kindness you have shown in answering me, and I will go my way. I am sorry Monsieur de Monterey is not at home."

"I can tell you almost the same things that he would tell you. I am perfectly informed about them. I heard my husband telling what he knew about it to the agent of the police. It is about his having met in a restaurant the man who was killed, is it not?"

"Yes, madame. . . . They told me to come here."

"Well—what would you like to know?"

"It seems that Cousin Pierre very imprudently displayed—indeed emptied—his pocket-book on the table, . . . that he showed a great roll of bank-notes—"

"That is true," replied Gabrielle, who was leaning one hand heavily upon her knee, being afraid her visitor might see it tremble; "my husband told me so."

"It seems also that the poor man was half-tipsy. There were some women there that night—"

"Have they not been examined?" asked Madame de Monterey, who was not pleased by an allusion to the women who had been present at the supper.

"Ah! if they could only have put them to the torture!" cried Emilienne, with a flash of implacable detestation all of a sudden darting from her black eyes. "I have been to see them," she added, bitterly.

"You?"

"I would go to see anybody if it would do any good. To save Jean, I would walk barefoot over a furnace! At the restaurant they gave me the address of these women. I went to see them. I questioned them. I don't know if they told me the truth—they

could only tell me what I knew already. . . . They told me Pierre displayed with ostentation the contents of his pocket-book. He paid for them, . . . then after that they went away, or they say so! But is this true? . . . Ah! if I could find any pretext to get them arrested! I would not hesitate; once in prison, they might be frightened into telling all. . . . But the police decline to arrest any more people, now that they have my husband at Mazas."

Emilienne's eyes were dry, but she passed her hand over her mouth as if to wipe some moisture away.

"What led to your husband's arrest?" asked Gabrielle, timidly.

"The notary who knew about the will. They went to him first. I went there, too, yesterday. He is not a hard-hearted man. He told me all that was said in his office, and overheard by his clerks and himself. My husband was in despair at getting nothing from his uncle. . . . For you know there was a will?"

"I know."

"We wished too much for that legacy; that wish brought us bad luck. . . . We were ruined. We thought we were on the eve of finding ourselves without bread or shelter; but it is no reason, because one has exhausted all resources, that one should commit a crime!"

"No," murmured Gabrielle.

"Jean might have killed himself, perhaps, had not the recollection of his little girl and of me kept him from suicide. Yes, I have a little girl, madame. She is just three, poor little dear! Well! if Jean had been tempted to commit a crime, one look of hers into her father's face would have stopped him. But there was no danger! Ah! madame, if you only knew what a night he spent! He dared not come home. He wandered about like a madman all night in the Bois, and that is one of the things that they say tell against him. . . . I had a terrible night too. . . . *You* can not understand what it is, madame, to sit up all night for a husband who does not come home!"

Gabrielle here could not help moving her head gently, to make Emilienne feel that she understood.

Madame Mortier went on:

"I said to myself all that night, 'Something dreadful has happened!' My presentiment was right, but it was Jean I thought that it would happen to. . . . I did not go to bed all night. . . . I came

down into the street very early in the morning. . . . I wish I had come down earlier, and had gone to find him in the Bois. Who knows? Perhaps I might have met or scared away the murderer! . . . Perhaps I might have come up just at the time he was attacking our cousin. . . . I might have seen him, . . . I might have hindered him. Something would have drawn me to the spot! After a while Jean came home, tired, discouraged, but not like a guilty man. I should have seen it in his face. . . . When one loves one's husband one reads him like a book. You know that, don't you, madame?"

"Yes, I know it," Gabrielle ventured to say, in a tone which to other ears might seem sincere, but which to herself had a ring of irony.

"If you had only seen him kiss his little daughter and kiss me! There is a witness who can testify to that! . . . When a man has committed such a crime, don't you suppose he would be afraid to put his lips to his wife's cheek or to his child's forehead? Say, madame?"

Gabrielle here remembered that Gaston had not dared to kiss her lips, that he had only kissed her hands. But, on the other hand, he had taken his little boy out walking.

What Madame Jean Mortier was telling her made Madame de Monterey in some ways more alarmed than ever, and in others it gave her relief. Sometimes she felt as if in the presence of danger, and the next moment some of her terror seemed to have passed away. She felt an attraction, a sympathy, for the young wife, about her own age, who was exhibiting a courage equal to her own, who had the same feelings and who might be equally unhappy, though on one point there was a difference in her favor. Madame Mortier confidently believed her husband innocent.

"Poor woman!" she said to Emilienne, putting out her hand, but not daring to take that of her visitor.

The upholsterer's wife either did not observe or did not comprehend this sign of friendliness, or else, out of respect, she would not accept that proof of Christian charity.

She went on, with a little pride in her tone:

"Yes, I am much to be pitied. But I should be more so if I did not know my husband was not guilty. When you suffer an injustice, you have something within yourself that prevents your being totally miserable."



"Then you have not the very smallest doubt of his innocence?" Madame de Monterey ventured to say.

"Ah! madame, can a wife doubt the husband whom she loves, and who she knows loves her?"

"Oh! that is no sure reason," said Gabrielle, softly, trying to smile.

"Among you people of the world, perhaps not, madame. Your gentlemen have almost all of them some little secret vice, which, though you do not know it, makes you fear. They lose money at cards, . . . they go to late suppers, . . . as your husband did that evening. But among us lesser people strong love is the guarantee for everything. Jean is no gambler; he never goes to the *café*, he never told me a lie in his life. I should be unworthy of his love if I could suspect him of deceiving me!"

Gabrielle felt bitterly jealous of Emilienne's confidence in her husband. She also felt some surprise and secret terror as she wondered why Jean Mortier's wife, so clear-headed and so capable of reasoning, did not accuse men who *did* gamble, who *did* frequent *cafés*, who *did* tell lies to their wives, of the crime of which she felt her own husband was incapable.

Then, as if Madame de Monterey's thoughts had revealed themselves upon her face, and as if Madame Mortier had read them there, the little woman said, suddenly:

"Had it not been for the notary and the things he told of hearing, they might just as well have arrested those gentlemen, and have accused your husband as mine."

Gabrielle drew herself up, a movement which misled Emilienne.

"Excuse me for supposing such a thing," she said, hastily, with some confusion, "but, indeed, the sight of twenty-five thousand francs—"

"Ah! did the poor man have twenty-five thousand francs about him?" asked Gabrielle.

"Yes, madame, deducting what he had spent. It was a prize that might have tempted a fashionable gambler. . . . A waiter at the restaurant told me that the gentlemen at supper had been joking about it among themselves, because one of them had lost a great deal of money that evening—"

Gabrielle had an inspiration.

"That was my husband. He had been unlucky at his club," she

said, with a smile that passed slowly over her lips, and disconcerted Madame Mortier.

"I thought it had been one of the others," she said; "they gave me his address."

Emilienne pulled a bit of paper out of her pocket, opened it, and read:

"Monsieur des Arbois."

It was to recover herself rather than to bring on any explanations that she introduced this memorandum, this name, into what she was saying, for she was sorry to have made any allusion to M. de Monterey's losses at play, and thus to have probably displeased the kind lady who had received her so kindly, and who was giving her all her attention.

Gabrielle, too, was anxious to get away from this episode.

"Why have you not been to see Monsieur des Arbois?"

"I did go, . . . but he had just set out on a long journey."

Gabrielle wiped away a drop of moisture on her forehead, which Emilienne had not noticed, and very gently but impressively said:

"Did it never occur to you that he was running away?"

"Yes, frankly, I should have thought so, perhaps, if I had not found out that he had gone to inherit a fortune; and, besides, he must have heard that my husband was arrested, and after that, if he was guilty, he would not have gone off in such haste. He would have felt himself in safety."

"Very true."

"Still, all may not be ended—even for him."

"What do you mean?"

"The notary has the numbers of some of the stolen notes."

Gabrielle thought she should certainly faint. The moisture stood out over her face. Happily, it was nearly dark. The two women were talking in a room that was growing every moment darker, and saw each other only by the firelight.

Madame de Monterey stooped down and made it burn up brighter. When she had picked up and settled the fallen brands upon the hearth, she straightened herself and felt that she had regained her courage.

"Do you think," she said, "that those numbers alone will lead to the arrest of the guilty person?"

"Unless the robber, warned in time, should burn the stolen money."

"What is likely to warn him?"

"Ah! I don't know," said Emilienne; "you are right, madame, it would need some chance. . . . Those men who change gold for notes don't generally take the addresses of people who come to them to change money, . . . even supposing the police had warned the money-changers."

"Do you suppose they have been warned?"

"Yes—no doubt. But, unfortunately, the notary had kept the numbers of only three of the notes."

"Only three?"

Gabrielle looked down at the ashes on her hearth. She was saying to herself that she had burned only two thousand-franc notes. Ah! if she could only—that very moment—get at the numbers kept by the notary!

"But," continued Madame Jean Mortier, eagerly, "it will be too long a time for me to wait for a mere chance. If I set my hopes upon that only, they will have plenty of time to sentence my husband, and to—"

Here she made a terrible gesture with her hand, and shut her eyes, as if she saw the vision of a scaffold.

Gabrielle trembled.

She had not before thought of the guillotine, and yet that must be the end of it.

There was two minutes' silence. The two women bowed their heads under a sense of the same terror. Gabrielle looked up first. She felt anger against Madame Mortier, who, instead of bringing her certainty and reassurance on all points, had only added to her troubles.

She became colder and less friendly, as she said:

"Did they not find in your house some of the money stolen?"

"That was a mistake of the reporters," replied Madame Mortier, firmly. "There was nothing found in our house but money we had received, and the envelope of a letter in which our cousin had sent us two thousand francs."

"When did he send them to you?"

"I don't know."

Gabrielle's mouth had an expression of incredulity. She thought the answer compromised the upholsterer.

Emilienne told of the arrival of the envelope, the great joy with which it had been received, the debts she had paid at once, and, of

course, she repeated her husband's account of how he came to write his own address on an envelope belonging to the notary.

Gabrielle gave a selfish sigh of relief. The evidence seemed to her to be compromising the upholsterer more and more.

"The police must have considered it very improbable," she said, in a slow voice, which Madame Mortier felt to be very cruel, "that your cousin would have sent two thousand francs in that way to you in the middle of the night. Why should he not have given this money with his own hand to your husband at the notary's?"

"If it had not appeared improbable," said Emilienne, simply, "would my husband have been arrested? But it is the truth, and that is why I will never give up—I shall never be weary."

Then Gabrielle was guilty of an imprudence. She threw out a challenge to the touching trustfulness of the wife. The hope that was becoming uppermost in her own heart overexcited her.

"Are you perfectly sure that he told you the truth?" she asked, insinuatingly.

Emilienne darted a glance at her from her dark eyes, piercing and bright as the sparkle of a diamond.

"Yes," she cried; "and it *is* true!"

Then, taking her revenge, she turned boldly on Madame de Monterey.

"Don't *you* love *your* husband? If you did, you would understand me."

"Great love sometimes inspires great illusions."

"No, madame; it is false love that inspires them," replied Emilienne, whose remark showed more fine discrimination, delicacy, and psychology than that of the woman of the world. "When one lives in falsehood one accepts what is false as an excuse; but the true demand the truth, and they know it when they find it. Since I love my husband truly, he can not make me doubt him; nor would he deceive me."

Gabrielle was more than put down in argument by this answer. There was that in it which jarred upon her doubts and her anxieties. She went on, almost mercilessly:

"The papers also mention that they have found a hammer—"

"Yes, madame; my husband's hammer—a steel hammer, . . . which he always carries about with him. Ah! it was a fatal circumstance that he had it with him that day!"

"A fatal circumstance indeed!" said Gabrielle, shaking her head.

"What could you call it but a fatal circumstance?" cried Emilienne. "An accident? Well, do so, if you please. But I swear to you, madame, that that hammer is as pure from bloodstains as my husband!"

"That must be known by this time, must it not? If the hammer fits the wounds exactly—?"

"Well, suppose it does? If all appearances were against him, if they were heaped up, piled up to overwhelm him, I tell you, madame, I should still *know* that Jean was innocent! There is something stronger than appearances, stronger than circumstances, and that is the impossibility that Jean is guilty."

Emilienne had risen, and seemed to have grown taller. Her mouth trembled, her pale cheeks were flushed with a faint color; her eyes gleamed like lightning, they shone in that dim room with a brightness brighter than the light of the fire.

She moved the heart of Madame de Monterey, which was very easily stirred; but she did not succeed in convincing her, for Gabrielle was resolved not to be convinced.

She had suffered too much herself not to be mistrustful of a wife's faith in her husband. She admired the simple woman, radiant with conjugal affection, but she compared her own daily suffering love to this love triumphant, and, from experience, and also with heroic resolution, she refused to admit that love was enough to enable a woman to see into the conscience of a lover or a husband.

"I pity you!" she said, with deep compassion.

"Yes—but you do not believe him innocent, as I do?"

"I am forced to make some account of the very grave presumptions and the proofs—the money and the hammer."

Her voice failed her as she uttered the last word. She looked into the fire.

"You will not admit, then," said Emilienne, in a plaintive voice, for her energy now needed a moment's respite—"you will not admit that our unfortunate cousin may have regretted his want of kindness, and have taken pity upon us?"

"It is possible. And it is also possible that your husband may have used the envelope to turn aside suspicion."

Emilienne grew agitated, and clasped her hands.

"Is it not possible, too," she cried, impetuously, without chang-

ing her form of interrogation, "that there may have been other hammers of the same shape as my husband's hammer?"

"Of course, just as it is possible, and it also seems probable, that your husband may have made use of his."

"And it is possible," said Madame Mortier, "that there may have been other men wandering by night in the Bois."

"Yes; and your husband was wandering there all night."

"Ah, madame!" cried Emilienne, deeply wounded by her words, "why should you want to persuade me that my husband is guilty?"

Gabrielle did not falter.

"You see that you yourself are beginning to admit a doubt," she said, in the same tone.

"I suffer; but I do not doubt."

"It is not willingly that I have made you suffer."

Why was there a *tremolo* in Gabrielle's voice as she excused herself in these words?

"You only add another pain to those that are mine already," replied Emilienne, and suddenly her voice trembled as if keeping back her tears. "It would not have astonished me to hear such language from Monsieur de Monterey. Men may think hard things, and be the dupes of appearances; but a woman, . . . a wife, . . . a mother, I should think, might understand—"

Her dignity, which increased as she said these words, somewhat subdued Gabrielle. She, too, felt her eyes filling with tears.

It was no longer dangerous for her to give way to her feelings. Jean Mortier was so manifestly the murderer.

If his wife, by a touching mistake, persisted in thinking him innocent, it was surely for Madame de Monterey to sympathize with her.

And with this pity for the faith of a love great as her own, though very different in its character, there was mingled an involuntary sense of gratitude to the wife of the murderer. To her Gabrielle would owe all the peace of her future life. She might very well in return give her such consolation as she was able.

She took Emilienne's hands and drew her toward her.

"Do not let us discuss it," she said, softly; "I will help you—"

"To find him who is guilty?"

"To save your husband."

"But I want to save his honor too, madame."

"In saving his life you may save everything."

"You make me that offer of help out of mere charity—not because you believe in his innocence!"

"I make you the offer from the bottom of my heart."

Emilienne struggled against her sense of gratitude.

"How can you expect me to accept it if, in your inmost heart, you think my husband is a murderer?"

Gabrielle persisted, both in her sympathy for the wife, and her conviction with regard to the husband.

"I do not judge Monsieur Mortier," she said, "but, if it were my duty to judge him, I should say to myself that you love him, that you are a brave, good woman, full of honorable feeling, and of courage, and, besides, a tender mother. I should think of you and of your little girl, and, without excusing the man who may be guilty, I should deeply pity him. I should persuade myself that love for you and his sudden stroke of misfortune had made him crazy."

Emilienne drew away from her, and wiped her eyes.

"No, madame, no! You can not help me. I thank you for your compassion for myself. But if I prove my husband's innocence, I shall not need it. Ah! then you might well envy me. But I will not permit a rich woman like you, out of mere compassion for an unhappy wife and mother, to take under her protection a man she can think capable of so great a crime."

"You are very wrong," murmured Gabrielle.

"But think of it," resumed Emilienne, growing fierce with rising anger, "if they say truth, Jean must have basely followed his cousin, have waylaid him in the wood, and struck him dead. He must have bent over his warm and bleeding corpse, felt in his pockets, robbed him. . . . Don't you see the scene before you, madame—that horrible scene? Just imagine your own husband an actor in it!"

Gabrielle saw the scene as Emilienne described it. The horrible vision danced before her eyes. The muscles of her face began to twitch.

It seemed to her that she saw Gaston drunk, crazy, striking at arm's length a man whose face she had never seen, but who now appeared to her in a mask of blood.

She stretched out her closed hands, which Emilienne had rejected a few minutes before:

"Oh, hush—oh, hush!" she cried.

"If I could suppose that my husband had acted thus," resumed

Emilienne, "I should feel myself his accomplice, because I had not done all I could to stimulate his conscience. But I need not prove he is no murderer because I know that I never could have killed. First prove to me that he never has loved me and does not love his daughter! Ah! that would be to slander love and motherhood, since then the wife and child would not have had power to hold back his hand from murder, would not have put into his heart a horror of crime, if not the fear of God. . . . No, madame, if you do not believe in his innocence when you see me believe in it, you can not and you ought not to try to help me!"

"You are very obstinate!" said Gabrielle, with pleading gentleness.

"Forgive me, madame. But it seems to me only natural that I should refuse protection which irritates my very-soul. If I could have convinced you I should not decline, for you are kind-hearted, madame; you are a mother as I am, and I feel something within me that draws me toward you. You too, no doubt, have to bear your troubles and your sorrows. I see that you can shed tears."

"Yes," exclaimed Gabrielle, carried away by her generosity—"yes, I know what it is to weep. Oh! I beseech you, let me join with you—"

"I have no tears—I will not shed any," said Emilienne, quickly. "It was politeness made me forget my resolution—thank you for your kindness. I do not wish to presume on it. The papers will tell you if I succeed. But, in refusing the offers you have made me, I do not give up the hope of saving my husband. You do not know as yet, and I am but beginning to learn, what human justice is. It is no use to try and move the judges to the end that they may set my husband free. It is not *that* I want; I want proofs—proofs of Jean's innocence! When I remember that there lives a fiend—a wretch—who robbed the man he killed, who knows from the papers that Jean has been arrested, that a hammer has been seized in our house, and who, at this moment, is rubbing his hands with glee, after having hidden or flung into the river a hammer like that of my husband! . . . O God—my God, help me to find this murderer! It seems to me that, if I could only look upon his face, I should know him!"

Gabrielle turned toward the parlor-door. She fancied she heard footsteps, as if Gaston and her boy were coming home. She did not want Madame Mortier to meet Monsieur de Monterey. Her



fears *would* keep coming back, in spite of her firm belief in the guilt of Jean Mortier.

She could not find even a few commonplace words to say.

Emilienne took this silence for assent.

"You see," she said, with resignation, "that even if I were so weak as to yield to the kindness expressed by you in words, if we found no new clew, if we did not succeed in discovering the true culprit, and in bringing him to justice, we should simply have mingled our tears. I will not trouble you any further, since all you can do for me is to pity me, madame. Adieu."

She made a courtesy, and drew toward the door. Gabrielle detained her by a gesture.

"At least let us share the means you hold in reserve to save your husband," she said. "I promise you to talk it over with Monsieur de Monterey, and, if he tells me anything that could be useful to you, I will send it to you at once. . . . You need not come back, . . . but leave me your address. Ah! . . . and I would also like to know the numbers of the bank-notes that were written down by the notary."

Gabrielle concealed her anxiety in asking this.

Madame Mortier seemed surprised at her wanting them.

"What's the use?" she said.

"Why, . . . I often have bank-notes."

"From your husband? Yes, I know Monsieur de Monterey must handle a good many at his club. . . . Ah! those gamblers!"

Gabrielle shivered, but she concealed her emotion.

"And I have friends who are bankers," she hastened to say.

Emilienne pulled out of her bosom a little bit of paper and held it out to Gabrielle.

"You can't see anything by this light," she said.

It was, indeed, too dark. Madame de Monterey might have lighted a wax-candle, but she either did not think of it, or did not wish to let light into the room.

"Oh, I can see well enough," she replied.

She stooped down, knelt upon one knee before the fire, and, on the other, by the fire-light, wrote down in her little memorandum-book, which already contained the numbers of the notes destroyed, the numbers given her by Emilienne, and also the latter's address.

She had shown a vivacity and eagerness in writing this which, under other circumstances, might have passed for gayety.

"Thank you," she said to the poor wife, returning her paper. "If I learn anything, I know now where to find you—"

"Ah! try and learn something soon," sighed Emilienne.

"Meantime," resumed Madame de Monterey, "you can not prevent my praying for you with all my heart."

"Ah! that I shall be glad of," said the upholsterer's wife, meekly, "though I have no need," she added, recovering herself, "to be told to take my trials myself to God."

Gabrielle was sorely tempted to say:

"While I pray for you, will you pray for me?"

But she was afraid to make this request, as if it might seem like hypocrisy. To ask Emilienne's prayers, to hope that the poor woman might bring her good fortune, was assuredly not uniting with her in what was for her own good—it was asking a sacrifice. The hopes of the one seemed horribly dependent on the fears of the other.

Madame Mortier retired.

As the *salon* had grown dark, especially in the farther parts of it, where the reflection of the fire, not very bright, did not extend, Madame de Monterey, in order to prevent Emilienne from knocking herself against the furniture, took her hand and led her toward the door.

Emilienne allowed her to retain it. She could not well resist this passing union—never guessing that it was a sign and a symbol.

The antechamber had been lighted up. The two women there looked at each other, each wishing to preserve the external expression of feeling that had been mingled, outraged, understood, and misunderstood during their interview.

They bowed to each other, and exchanged sad smiles. The smile of Gabrielle was a promise, the smile of Emilienne asked pardon for refusing the other's kindness, and was a sign of gratitude for the reception accorded her by Madame de Monterey.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## AN ILLUMINATION.

WHEN Gabrielle went back into her *salon*, she rushed to the chimney-piece and lighted all the wax-candles.

She wanted to have a good light to make sure of the numbers given her by Madame Mortier, and to compare them with the numbers of the burned notes that she had written down herself.

The examination was a brief one; it established Gaston's innocence. Neither of the notes returned by Monsieur Henrion bore numbers that would implicate him.

Gabrielle gave a sigh of triumph, as if she had expected this result.

It was true that Monsieur Henrion had only returned her two notes for a thousand francs, together with some smaller ones.

It was true that Monsieur Henri des Arbois had gone off with fifteen more notes, which might include those that bore the fatal numbers.

It was true that the upholsterer's wife had mentioned twenty-five thousand francs, and that Gabrielle did not exactly remember what sum her husband professed to have won at cards.

Alas! if by chance he owned to having won twenty-five thousand francs, Madame de Monterey's anguish, instead of passing off, would only begin over again.

But, no! Here, on this very spot, before that fire, from that very chair, had not Gabrielle seen a woman more menaced by a chain of real circumstances, that was tightening round her, than she need be by vague appearances, by moral impossibilities which she could not reconcile together in her own mind? Had she not just listened to the unhappy wife of the upholsterer, defending her husband, and afraid she might defend him to his hurt?

Had they not found a hammer belonging to Jean Mortier, which corresponded to the marks on the head of the murdered man?

Could the upholsterer satisfactorily explain the circumstance of his having spent the night in the Bois de Boulogne?

And, finally, was he not in the hands of the law, which rarely lets its prey escape, and which, besides, acts deliberately, never ar-

resting people unless appearances are greatly against them, and in consequence is very rarely mistaken?

Gabrielle was an optimist. She believed in human justice. Emilienne did not.

Is not faith often the result of a strong desire to believe?

But if Madame Mortier did not believe in lawyers she did believe, feverishly, obstinately, frankly, and sublimely, in the innocence of her husband. This ineradicable belief seemed an untoward circumstance to Gabrielle, even now that every other danger appeared to have passed away.

Why might she not suppose that Madame Mortier was trying to deceive her?

Why not?

Gabrielle grew excited at this thought; she lit up all the candles in the candelabras with their prisms. She wanted all possible light.

Leaning her elbow on the fireplace, and looking at herself steadily in the glass, under the light of the wax-candles and in the light of her own eyes, she studied her own face and then said to herself:

"Have not I been trying to deceive her—am I not anxious to lead every one astray? Did I not make that unhappy woman my dupe? Does not the power of self-sacrifice, that gives me courage to smile, enable me to comprehend the duplicity of this wife and mother, who is as jealous as I am of her honor and good name? And suppose I had proofs against Gaston instead of accumulating, as I am now doing, proofs of his innocence, could I not be capable of dissimulation, so that no one might suspect my fears? Do not wives, even the best of us, have the most marvelous power of deception where our love is concerned, and surely God is not angry with us for hiding our tears under a mask, which stifles our cries as we endure martyrdom? A woman can not be a mother and a wife, and tell the whole truth to a sick child, or to a husband who has to be brought back to goodness. . . . I ought to laugh when I want to cry—and then I do laugh. I try to look handsome, I try to look happy! And who would not be deceived by my looks? That poor woman just now was deceived by them. Why may she not also have been deceiving me?"

As she said this, with her beautiful face almost transfigured, but with a pang in her heart, Gabrielle was smiling to herself before the glass, taking pleasure in the pastime, endeavoring to persuade

herself that she had hit upon the truth at last, for she well knew that, the moment she stopped coquetting with her conscience, she would fall down sobbing on her knees.

The sound of voices in the anteroom interrupted this survey of herself.

Gaston and his boy were coming home from their walk. They came back very merry; they were singing. That was another strange thing—doubly strange—for Monsieur de Monterey never had a habit of singing, and the little boy was unusually silent for his age, under the influence of the sadness of his home.

Was it possible that Gaston, past-master in the art of lying, was doing exactly what his wife had done, endeavoring to demonstrate both to her, and to himself to what degree of perfection he could carry the art of deception?

"Ah! I will soon know if this is real!" thought Gabrielle, and suddenly she remembered the words of Madame Jean Mortier, and fancied that lies were as perceptible as truths to true conjugal affection.

In the disorder of her spirit, drawn all ways at once, she mixed together the most contradictory theories; she took up the very one she had just been convincing herself was false, and, after having demonstrated satisfactorily to herself what powers the determination to be false puts into the hands of those led into deception through self-devotion or through fear, she was ready to imagine in an instant that at the first glance she would be able to see under the mask if her husband were deceiving her.

She went forward to meet them as they came in from their walk.

They came in, keeping step in a sort of march, like two little playfellows at play. Their walk seemed to have intoxicated them.

Roger was a beautiful boy; he had his mother's blue eyes, dreamy and soft, a well-shaped mouth, already thoughtful, taking its expression from the faces round him.

From his father he had his beautiful white skin and polished forehead. Gabrielle was sometimes disquieted lest this should be a sign of physical or moral weakness.

But Roger's health was excellent. Only he grew tall rather than stout in his somewhat melancholy home. Like flowers growing in the shade, he grew up toward the sun, which did not often reach him of itself.

It would have been sacrilege to accuse him of deception. He had the innocence that children have whose mothers rarely leave them. But his intelligence made him conscious of a mysterious want of harmony between the two who both kissed him, the one to comfort herself, the other when in need of self-restraint; and, tender to his mother, but fond of his father at the same time, he became a close observer, and serious by instinct. His little laughs were sometimes only an effort to hide his childish embarrassment, when he did not know why he pitied his little mamma, or what he could blame his papa for.

That evening he was wildly gay. He broke step, ran to his mother, jumping round her as he kissed her, and bringing her a big bouquet of violets.

He was not false, dear little fellow! He was bringing home the gayety to which his father had been treating him as they took their walk, as well as to milk in the Bois de Boulogne, and waffles in the Champs-Élysées.

"O mamma," he cried, sucking in the kiss that Gabrielle gave him, "we have had such a nice time!"

"Where have you been?" asked Madame de Monterey, yielding to the charm of his caress.

"To the Bois de Boulogne; he insisted on going," said Gaston, in the best of humors, going toward his wife, and holding out both his hands.

Monsieur de Monterey's face had never looked so beaming, his eyes so brilliant, or his mouth so serene.

He was frankness itself. Nature was revealing itself.

Gabrielle did not ask herself whether all this excitement might not arise from a sense of an unexpected great deliverance rather than from innocence. She was quite taken in by its evident reality.

She was weary of analysis. She wanted to have the comfort of feeling that she had done her husband wrong.

Like women deeply in love, who, after having tried to pluck up by the roots, one by one, all their reasons for not loving, suddenly appear to give up all restraint and rush into an absorbing passion, so Gabrielle, in presence of this man, grown beautiful, as he seemed to her, with all the beauty of their early married life, the precious grown-up baby she had promised always to protect, resolved only to listen to the voice of her tenderness, to devote herself more absolutely than ever to that vocation of sister, mother, and protectress,

to which she had been consecrated by her guardian, Gaston's father.

Her duty was to love, whatever happened, before everything else, always. To love was a higher duty than to judge. She had no need of any long arguments to be convinced of that.

Her conversation with Emilienne had charged her with a sort of electricity which was not exactly related to any question of morality, to any suspicions, to any past scruples, but was like sparks thrown off from the love of another woman devotedly attached to her husband; and influenced also by the bright springtide that Roger and Gaston had brought home from their walk in the Bois, she, too, wanted the voice of her youth to find utterance in song and speech—that voice that so long had been hushed—had been constrained.

She bent her forehead toward her husband for his kiss; for some months past he had only kissed her hands, and as Gaston's lips touched her she felt neither the chill that the lips of a criminal might be supposed to communicate, nor any fever of remorse. It was the warm, caressing touch of real affection, a conjugal kiss, simple and true.

Her heart sighed away its last anxieties, and, covering her smile with the bunch of violets, whose fragrance she inhaled with all her might, she said, interrupting her words by putting the flowers to her lips:

"So you have had a charming walk?"

"Yes," said Gaston, "a very pleasant one, and it has given us grand appetites—Roger, has it not?"

"There wasn't any good milk in the Bois de Boulogne," broke in the child. "Papa made me drink some beer, and that has made me hungry."

Gabrielle laughed at this argument.

"Well, then," she said, "I will hurry up dinner."

She rang. The man-servant, who came in for orders, brought a lamp, which he put down on a side-table. When he saw so many wax-lights burning he was going to put some of them out, thinking them unnecessary.

"No, leave them. You will make a smell," said Gabrielle, gayly.

And, when the servant had gone out, she said:

"We will have a grand illumination this evening."

"What for?" asked Monsieur de Monterey, hesitatingly, as he stretched himself at ease in his arm-chair.

Gabrielle thought that question put the finishing touch to her conviction.

"You seem as if you were returning from a *fête*," she said. "You are all lighted up yourselves. I, who was left at home alone, am going to have my turn."

"Yes—yes," cried Roger, whose plumed hat and velvet wrapping his mother was taking off as she spoke. "Let's light them all up and make fire-works."

"You should have come with us," said Gaston, languidly, yawning, either from hunger or a well-satisfied weariness.

"You never asked me to come with you, and, besides," added Gabrielle, not willing to be too gay, "I should have missed a visit which affected me very much, and which may give me the opportunity of doing a good action."

"The visit of some charitable lady?"

"No."

"Then, who was it?"

Gabrielle was surprised at herself for having introduced the subject of the visit of Madame Mortier, but it was the last dark shade that was likely to flicker over her new-found happiness, so she thought she had better bravely make an end of it.

"It was something more," she said, "about that horrible affair in the Bois de Boulogne."

Gaston did not start. He yawned again, carelessly. The second yawn was longer than the first.

"Ah!"

"It was the wife of the poor man they have arested; . . . she is quite a nice person, . . . she touched me very much—"

"He has confessed," said Gaston, suddenly interrupting her.

"How do you know it?"

"The evening papers tell how he has been confronted with the body. See for yourself."

He pulled a paper out of his pocket. Gabrielle took it, but did not open it. She put it down upon the table.

"Poor woman," she said, with a sigh, "how I pity her!"

"Yes," said Gaston, who had got over his yawns, and now sat up in his arm-chair, "the scene they say was very dramatic. . . . There is no room for any further doubt. The little hammer they found, when they made their search, is the thing he used in doing it."



"What kind of a hammer?" asked Roger, who was listening to their talk, but could not understand.

Neither Monsieur nor Madame de Monterey made him any answer. Roger, who probably had a fancy for little hammers, persisted:

"What hammer? what hammer?"

"An upholsterer's hammer," said Gaston, rather impatiently.

Roger did not seem to understand any better than before; but his curiosity was sharpened.

"What is an upholsterer's hammer like?"

Gaston saw no need of entering into an explanation.

Roger pulled his mother's gown, and repeated the question.

"My darling," answered Gabrielle, kindly, but frowning a little as she spoke, "it is a very little hammer, like the handle . . . you know . . . of your papa's cane."

This time Roger quite understood. Why did his face grow red? He asked no more questions, but, going up to the fireplace, stood looking down upon the glowing coals, as red as his face.

When Gabrielle answered her boy's question, she had involuntarily cast a side-glance at her husband. But Gaston, just at that moment, was setting his hair in order—it had been slightly disarranged—and his wife could not satisfactorily observe the effect produced by this allusion to the cane he had destroyed, and the handle he had raked out of the ashes.

"What did that woman want of you?" asked Monsieur de Monterey, after an interval of silence.

"She hardly knew exactly, . . . she is like some restless soul, disquieted by a terrible anxiety, . . . she is making inquiries. She believes in her husband's innocence."

"That's only her duty, . . ." said Gaston de Monterey, in a low voice, and with a touch of bitterness and solemnity.

"Oh! it is more than duty, . . . it is because her love is so strong for him. They seem to love each other passionately; and that explains the crime as well as the belief of the poor woman. . . . You say he has confessed it?"

"Yes, you can read all the details."

"Well! I don't know if even his confession would convince her. She is sublime in her persistence. Would you believe it? She has been to see those women who supped that night in the same place

you did, . . . and, as they gave her your address at the restaurant—"

"Well! that would be enough to cure me of ever going to suppers and frequenting restaurants if I had not turned over a new leaf already and grown good!" interrupted Gaston, getting up and walking about the *salon*. "What isn't one exposed to! I'm tired of it. . . . You told her, of course, that I knew nothing? . . . She won't come back here—will she?"

"She won't come back; but, if I found out anything that might be useful to her, I was to go and see her. I have her address."

"I don't want it."

"I told her all that I had heard you tell the police agent. It wasn't much. She had been, too, to see your friend Monsieur des Arbois."

"He couldn't have told her any more than I could."

"She gave me the numbers of the bank-notes that had been stolen."

Gaston, tired of standing, now dropped again into his easy-chair.

"What do you want with those numbers?" he asked, again yawning.

"I will use them to compare with every bank-note that passes through my hands. . . . There were three numbers written down."

"No more?"

"That may be enough."

"Let me look at them."

"I have them here."

"Oh! I'm in no hurry," replied Gaston, laughing. "I haven't got any thousand-franc notes in my pocket, nor even in my drawers. As I have given up cards, I shall not be likely to bring home any from the club. It is for you to look after that, since Monsieur Henrion always pays your money into your own hands. . . . It was a mere foolish precaution, . . . useless, in fact, which made me ask you for those numbers, . . . in case there should ever again come a day in which I should not be absolutely *cleaned out*."

The tone of these last words, and the final slang, spoiled somewhat the assurances they were meant to renew to Gabrielle.

It was not wise to let Madame de Monterey remember too often that her husband had been a gambler, and might be one again. That

slang of the club, that word *cleaned out*—*décauvé*—was one of the remaining taints of the vice that she hoped entirely to sweep away.

But, after all, Gabrielle retained one satisfactory assurance from her husband's flow of words. He had no more bank-notes in his possession.

Had he destroyed those that had been in his hands? Or had he had none but those he paid away?

She had little time to think about that question. Dinner was on the table.

Gaston's gayety continued and increased at table. His gayety explained his appetite; his appetite increased his thirst. He kept on drinking healths to his wife and son. At dessert he called for champagne, insisted on Gabrielle's filling her glass, which she would not empty; let Roger wet his lips in the froth; did all sorts of absurd things; made believe he was at supper, declaring he would like to sup that way every night of his life; talking all sorts of nonsense about the journey they were going to make, declaring he had a particular fancy for traveling, and cared for nothing so much as going to distant countries; and, finally, regretted that he had not gone to India with his friend Monsieur des Arbois.

Gabrielle listened to him quietly. She was grave, but hid her gravity by an indulgent smile.

When he rose from table he had some difficulty in steadying himself. It was evident he had lost the power to walk straight.

"You have made me tipsy—positively tipsy," he said to his wife, snapping his fingers, as if she had been pressing him to drink wine.

She took his arm, with a sort of maternal authority, to lead him back to the *salon*, astonished, but not greatly scandalized, by the readiness with which this man, notorious for fast living, had been overcome by his own gayety and a glass or two of champagne.

Roger, no longer hungry, was almost asleep. Gabrielle remained alone with her husband *tête-à-tête*, or rather she was all alone by herself, for Monsieur de Monterey soon went into a doze in his easy-chair.

She was not offended at this mode of proceeding. She was ready to pardon this neophyte of the fireside and home, and, though his first entrance on his new vocation had been consecrated by wine, she forgave his little lapse from strict sobriety. She was better pleased to see him asleep than to know he was at the card-table.

She said to herself that she would get accustomed to sit by him while he slept, reading to herself, or sewing. In the end maybe he would learn to keep awake, would talk to her, and perhaps get interested in literature.

It was a great gain to have reconquered him even at the price of a little excess.

As she picked up her sewing on a side-table, she put her hand on the paper that her husband had brought home, and which she had not yet read. She picked it up, and not willing to seem anxious, having persuaded herself that she had nothing more to fear, but she looked it all through, and ended at last by the supplement in which was a column headed "The Crime in the Bois de Boulogne."

"This morning," said the paper, "the man accused, who is probably the murderer, was confronted at the morgue with the body of his victim. The scene was very dramatic, and we may assure our readers, without going too far, that it seemed to convince monsieur the imperial *procureur* as well as the magistrates and the commissary who were present.

"As soon as the prisoner, whose real name we are the first to announce, and who is known as Jean Mortier, was placed in presence of the body, he was seized with violent trembling, and half closing his eyes, and looking down, he refused for some minutes to look again at the livid corpse, the face of which wore an expression of stolid astonishment, and on its temples has a hideous wound.

"However, on the magistrate's order for the third time, Jean Mortier submitted to the required confrontation. His look became fixed, his eyes staring. Horror made his face as white as that of his victim. When they tried to force him up to the body, he resisted at first, and it was thought that among the confused words he stammered were 'Pity! pity! Pardon! pardon!' However, when they asked him if he confessed to having murdered his cousin, he tried to gather himself up, to recover his self-possession, and through his closed teeth uttered a few excited denials.

"But these were evidently the almost unconscious protestation of an unfortunate man who most probably has committed his crime under a sudden impulse, and who did not till that moment perceive the enormity of his guilt.

"When the steel hammer which we have described was fitted to the wounds on the head of the deceased, the accused recovered a brief energy which seemed a supreme effort of his will. He watched

all the experiments attentively, and listened to the explanations of the surgeon.

"The body of the murdered man has three wounds in the skull. Two, though very deep, may only have stunned the victim, or have produced a slight congestion of the brain ; but the third wound, on the temple, must have killed him on the spot. The skull is completely fractured, and the brain has oozed out. . . ."

At this point in the narrative Madame de Monterey let fall the paper. She realized the horror that had come over Jean Mortier at the morgue.

She looked around her with terror, as if the corpse of the murdered man might rise before her, and point its finger to his gaping wounds.

But all she saw was Gaston stretched out in his arm-chair, with a bright color in his face, his head thrown back, his polished temples with the hair carefully smoothed over them, sleeping, peacefully and dreamlessly, the sleep of the just.

Then she felt ashamed of the fear that had seized her so suddenly, picked up her paper and continued to read.

The reporter had taken pains to give all possible details. He wanted to prove himself a past-master in matters belonging to the morgue.

"The hammer," he said, "so completely fitted the black marks of the bruises, and so exactly entered the hole made in the temple, that no one present could doubt that the police were in possession of the instrument with which the murder was committed.

"While this examination lasted, Jean Mortier did not utter a sound. When they attempted to interrogate him, he rolled his eyes as if frightened, struggled, made impatient gestures as if he saw an accusing specter, and fell backward in a fainting-fit, from which he did not recover till he was in the carriage being carried back to prison.

"It is said at the court-house that there are other facts which will be presented to the jury which are inexplicable, except on the supposition that the victim was waylaid and murdered ; and it is expected that the prisoner may be easily persuaded to abandon his line of defense.

"We do not know whether, on recovering from his fainting-fit, he made any direct confession ; but we think it very probable. Denial seems impossible, after the scene we have described. This con-

frontation has in it all the marks of the old ordeal, when appeal was made to the judgment of God. In old times it would have sufficed to condemn the prisoner; but modern justice proceeds more cautiously. She does not put her confidence in appearances, she accepts them only as affording her a clew.

"It is said that the preparation of the case by the *juge d'instruction*, which has been much simplified by what has passed this morning at the morgue, will be terminated almost immediately, and that the Chamber of the *Mises en Accusation*\* will make out its indictment in time to send Jean Mortier before the assizes of the Department of the Seine during next July.

"Jean Mortier has an interesting face. His broad forehead shows an intellectual development, which might be said to indicate a poet; but one remembers that Lacenaire aspired to write poetry, and that there are dreamers and enthusiasts who might become themselves victims and martyrs, but who, under the illusion of some fixed idea, become instead tyrants and murderers.

"He is married, and has a little daughter. It was rumored that the crime was committed to gratify the caprices of a mistress. The old adage, which is commonly right, of 'Find the woman,' seemed a sufficient explanation; but it is in our power to inform our readers that the marriage is a legal one, and that Madame Mortier is greatly esteemed in her own neighborhood.

"Our contemporary, therefore, was mistaken (though it always professes to be better informed than others) when it announced that Madame Jean Mortier had this morning been arrested as an accomplice. This fact is absolutely untrue.

"We will keep our readers fully informed, and they may judge, by the exactitude and fullness of the details that we here offer them, that we shall be in a position to gratify their legitimate curiosity.

"We heard monsieur the *commissaire de la prefecteur* of police remark that the murderer, notwithstanding his delicate appearance, must have been endued with more than common strength to have made such frightful wounds with so small a hammer. If it had had a long handle, the violence of the blow might be accounted for by the force of the swing; it would then have had the nature of

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\* Answering to our grand jury.—TRANSLATOR.

a sling, and the slight strength of the murderer would have been doubled. Will Jean Mortier use this point in his defense?"

Gabrielle again let fall the paper.

These last reflections of the journalist seemed to her like nails hammered into her bosom.

She did not know whether Jean Mortier was or was not physically stronger than her husband. Could Gaston have killed a man with an ordinary hammer? Might he not have needed that long handle, which the pliant stick of his cane so fearfully represented?

And, after all, Jean Mortier had not confessed. Gaston had deceived her, or else he had read carelessly. His fainting proved nothing but his extreme sensitiveness.

That so-called judgment of God, the old ordeal which the journalist so glibly alluded to to air his erudition, was just a phrase and nothing more. No; the upholsterer had probably made no confession. When he came to himself in the carriage he had no doubt protested earnestly against the construction that would be put upon his natural emotion. Gaston had been too eager to reassure her, if he guessed her emotion, or to reassure himself.

She looked at Monsieur de Monterey with a steady gaze that might have startled him in his slumbers. He was asleep, but not so peacefully as before, for he was restless in his chair, he frowned, his lips moved as if he wished to speak or to utter a cry.

By degrees as he moved, he got out of his seat, and, as he was almost about to slide down out of his chair, a sharp pain in his knee awakened him.

He drew himself up, recovered his balance, looked round him as if frightened, astonished apparently that he had not fallen down some precipice, saw Gabrielle looking at him, smiled vaguely, made believe to be dazzled by the light of the candles on the chimney-piece, and said:

"Have I been asleep?"

"Yes."

"Did I dream?"

"I don't know."

"It must be the open air," he went on; "I never go to sleep after my meals, as you know. It is not very polite of me—is it? . . . Is it late?"

He got up, looked at the clock, found out that it was only nine,

dared not say he would go to bed so early, and, sitting up in his arm-chair, which he drew nearer to his wife, said :

"Let us talk a little—will you?"

"I shall be very glad."

Gaston at this moment felt the paper under his foot, which had slipped down from his wife's lap in his direction. He picked it up.

"Have you read it?" he asked.

"Yes, but you made a mistake."

"What mistake?"

"That unhappy man, the upholsterer, has not confessed."

"Not confessed!"

"No. It only says that when he was confronted with the victim he was very much moved and fainted away."

"Well," said Monsieur de Monterey, in a lowered voice, "and what do you want more?"

"I don't want anything," replied Gabrielle, seized again with a dreadful doubt; "why should I want him to be guilty, especially now that I have seen his wife, and have become interested in her? I only said that his fainting proved nothing."

Gaston rubbed his hands and cracked his joints, and seemed to want to rub off his very skin.

"Well, I say that it proves everything," he said, nervously, at last, "and there are other things besides."

"Yes, the hammer; but—"

Gabrielle could not go on. She was afraid, and she was still more afraid when, after two minutes of silence, she saw that her husband was not going to ask her to finish her sentence, nor did he answer it, though he might guess the close.

The candles twinkled on the fireplace, and were multiplied by the two mirrors opposite each other, so that there were long vistas of illumination.

Gaston got up again, steadied himself on his legs, and was going to put out the glare of so much light, which hurt his eyes. But, drawing near one of the candelabra, he hesitated to blow out the candles, remembering what Gabrielle had said to the man-servant, and turned his back to the fireplace.

So doing, he saw the same vista of illumination at the other end of the *salon*, stretching away into the distance.

He walked round the room once or twice, knocking himself against the furniture, and went and flung himself into an easy-chair



near the lamp, as if he wanted to choose the light least painful to his eyes and to his feelings. He thought it incumbent on him to hum a little air, to prove that he was gay, although he seemed greatly fatigued by his walk and by the digestion of his dinner.

Gabrielle was seized by a sudden frenzy of despair and courage.

The hour seemed to her propitious to any attempt to get at the truth, if it were to be had from her husband. Madame Jean Mortier's visit had roused her, and had left her in a ferment of heroism. The singular agitation of Gaston brought back her former uneasiness. The account in the paper and the commentaries of the journalist, since they had not set her fears at rest, seemed more to alarm her than ever.

She must end it. The truth—let her but have the truth! She would think what must come of it after.

She rose resolved, went toward her husband, stood behind him, and, putting her hand upon his shoulder, said, in a voice at once tender and determined:

"Listen to me, Gaston. I have been tormented for the past three days by dreadful thoughts, and I want to set them at rest. . . . You promised me to give up cards—"

"Well, you see I am keeping my word; I am not gambling."

"Yes, but I want to know what brought you to this sudden resolution."

Gaston gave a little laugh, took his wife's hand, which worried him as it lay upon his shoulder, and, carrying it to his lips, said, with a child's submissiveness:

"I suppose you don't want me to tell a fib?"

"Oh, no! I implore you, *mon ami*, whatever you may have to tell me, . . . to confess to me, . . . tell the truth. I want the truth, the whole truth, do you hear? Don't be afraid of paining me—"

"Well, the truth is, I have been disgusted with cards this long time, and, as I am cleaned out, I have nothing left to play with. So, you see, I have no great merit. It was a very simple thing."

"And yet, the last time you played you won. People seldom leave off playing just as they have made an enormous gain."

"Why not? Yes, I won. But it is a chance that might never recur again, and I had a big debt to pay—"

"How much did you win?"

"You know, for I gave it all to you."

"You only gave me two thousand and some odd-hundred francs, and before that you paid Monsieur des Arbois."

"True; I forgot. I am so little accustomed to good luck that it confuses me. Well, yes; I won fifteen thousand francs, and afterwards about twenty-five hundred. That was all."

"All?"

"All, I swear! I have not got a sous left. Were you thinking I was making up a little purse for myself?"

"At what club did you win that money?"

This question was a home thrust, and her eyes made it keener. But Gaston was prepared.

Without hesitation, without a movement of his face, he named a club of which Gabrielle had never heard. But then it was not surprising that she did not know all the clubs in Paris.

"And who did you deprive of all this money?" she asked, leaning toward him, and looking at him with a smile—a smile that perchance might take flight at his answer.

"Who? Didn't I tell you?" replied Gaston. "It was Baron von Stultzburg, of Frankfort, a most persevering fellow. I really was sorry to win so much."

"And who is this baron?"

Gabrielle had never heard of the man he had been playing with, any more than she had ever heard of the club.

"Oh! he's a very agreeable man," said Monsieur de Monterey. "He is something of an artist, though he is a banker. If we were not just going away, I should like to have asked him to dinner."

"Well, then, ask him. We are not going immediately."

"That's true; but I think he is going to leave Paris."

"Ah! yes," said Gabrielle, sadly—very sadly, "that is to be feared. He is going away; probably he is gone already."

The sarcastic tone which pierced through the sad accent with which she uttered these words struck Gaston.

"No," he replied, "now I think of it I am sure he told me he would not go before the opening of the Exhibition at the *Salon*. . . . He is a great amateur. So we can ask him up to the 1st of May."

This was said with a sort of genial *bonhomie*.

Gabrielle, who felt oppressed, gave a long sigh.

The information that this baron, whom she did not know and whom her husband was so ready to present to her, had not left Paris reassured her a little.

However, the hardest question of all was yet unasked. She had to clear up something else, something very important, the history of the cane, broken, mended, and burned, and the disappearance of its steel handle.

Gabrielle hesitated. If Gaston's answer were not free, instantaneous, and decisive; if he hesitated or shirked the question, in spite of all the other reasons she might have to put faith in him, she should doubt—doubt violently, fearfully; or, rather, she would not doubt. She would *know*.

What implacable need, for her own sake as well as for her husband's, had she to know the truth? Did she want to look over the edge of an abyss and lose her balance? Yes—she did. Any abyss was better than uncertainty.

With maternal familiarity, with cruel caressingness, she suddenly took her husband's head in her two hands, and, turning his face up to her as one turns the face of a child whose eyes we desire to look into, and twisting his neck slightly so that he uttered a cry, she looked full into Monsieur de Monterey's eyes, with her own eyes very near him, and with her warm breath on his mouth, as if to insist upon an answer to her words.

"Tell me," she said, "why, when you came in the other evening, you hid your cane? Why was it broken? Why did you snatch it out of my hands when I gave it back to you? Why did you burn it? Why—"

"Why, what a lot of whys!" interrupted Gaston, with a short laugh.

The unnaturalness of the laugh might have been due to the way his throat was twisted.

Gabrielle let go his head, but did not release his eyes. Without taking hers from his face, she came half round him, and leaning her elbows on his chair, and bending over him, she waited for his answer.

"Jealous?" cried Monsieur de Monterey, laughing more freely.

Gabrielle frowned. This was not the answer she was waiting for.

Was Gaston conscious of the shock he was giving to his wife's feelings, or was he following up a plan prepared beforehand?

"Have not I told you all already?" he said, in an easy tone, putting the collar straight which had been disarranged by Gabrielle.

"No."

"Well, it is rather hard to confess."

"Ah!"

The poor woman began to tremble. And yet she went on resolutely to the end :

"Is it a crime you have committed?" she said, with a contraction of the lips meant for a smile, but her eyes were restless and her eyelids worked nervously.

Gaston started; but he laughed louder than ever.

"A crime? Well, yes, then—on that famous night I was not at the club after midnight. I know it was wrong, very wrong; I ought not to tell you, and if you get so fierce at the first word, I can't go on. . . ."

"Go on," she murmured, drawing closer to him.

"Well, then, my dear little woman. I went to see Henri des Arbois, and he was visiting a woman."

"Where does she live?"

"How curious you are!"

"I want to know everything. Where does she live?"

Gaston, without hesitation, gave her an address.

"What's her name?"

Gaston gave a name.

The rapidity of these answers was a masterpiece of effrontery; or else it was a proof of truth carried to the limit of propriety.

"I shall remember the name and the address," said Gabrielle, threateningly.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to find out if you have told me the truth. I will go and see her, as the wife of poor Jean Mortier went to see those women who supped at the same place as you."

Gaston seemed hurt.

"You don't encourage me much to be frank with you, my dear, seeing that for once I have made my confession without drawbacks or reserves."

"Ah! if I were only certain it was a full confession!"

"What penance would you inflict on me?"

"None. I should forgive you all the past, and believe you for the future."

Gaston reflected for a second or two, and bore with courage or effrontery the searching look in his wife's eyes.

"I have not anything very bad to confess," he said, with coaxing in his eyes and voice, and with charming frankness of manner.

"Then why don't you let me know at once?"

"My friend Henri des Arbois is always laughing at me, you know, for being so afraid of your goodness in contrast with my own folly."

Gabrielle here remembered that Monsieur des Arbois, who had sometimes come to see her, had jokingly spoken of the submission with which Gaston in common with other husbands would say to his friends when he stayed later than usual at the club, "Ah! if my wife could see me now, how she would scold me!"—exaggerating, of course, her indignation, but pleased to escape from her tutelage, and ready to plunge into fresh follies, because they had acquired the attraction boys find in playing truant.

With a little nod Madame de Monterey assented to the fact that she was greatly to be dreaded by her husband.

"Well," pursued Gaston, "the other night, all the time we were at cards and at supper, Henri kept on saying to me, 'You are afraid your wife will scold you—that she'll put you in the corner.' I came very near getting into a serious quarrel with him. . . . And then, out of stupid bravado, just to show I could do as I pleased, when he asked me to go with him and see an actress whom he visits, I agreed."

"Then that was before you went to the club where you won the money?"

"No. . . . We parted on the boulevard when we came out of the restaurant. . . . Then I gambled again and won. After I had the money I said to myself that I would not wait twenty-four hours before paying my debts, and I went and looked up my friend where I knew he was to be found."

"What! did you go and make a visit to any woman at three or four o'clock in the morning?"

"In the first place, it wasn't more than three, I recollect, and then I knew that I should not break in on a *tête-à-tête*."

Gabrielle's color modestly rose.

"How did you know that?"

"I knew that Henri's actress was at an actors' ball, and would not be home before early morning. He had asked me to come and keep him company while he was waiting, and said that we would have a game of *bésique*. I refused, but when I had won and had the money in my pocket—*fait Charlemagne*, as we say at the gaming-table—I thought it would be fine to go and tell him of my luck. We fellows are all like that! I knew where he would be, and there

I found him, yawning, trying experiments with the cards, all by himself, . . . tempted to get the lady's maid to play with him. Her mistress had not come home. We had time to settle up our accounts, and we were playing *bésique* when she came back with another lady. . . . Do you want her name and address, too?"

"No—no. Go on," murmured Gabrielle, ashamed to be forced to listen to such a story, confounded by the minuteness of the details, almost convinced by their number and particularity.

Gaston had recovered his self-assurance. He saw that his wife, though not yet convinced, was disposed to accept all he was relating to her.

He went on volubly :

"And then, while Henri paid court to his actress, I was the object of the other lady's attentions. . . . Why was she there? . . . I am sure I don't know. Excuse me for telling you all this. But you insisted on hearing it. I have not much more to tell you ; it was just one more piece of folly on my part, added to the many I have been guilty of. I had no right to leave you worrying all night alone for nothing. . . . I am sorry. . . . I did feel I ought not. . . . You will do me the justice to confess that, though I may be a good-for-nothing gambler, I never have given you cause to accuse me of anything else. So, . . . I was ashamed of having gone there. I was going away, when the young woman, very angry with me, seized my cane, which I had in my hand, and told me she should keep it as a forfeit. That I would not get it back again unless I came after it to her house. You know I never had much patience. . . . I wanted to recover what belonged to me, and I was a little too rough. It seemed to me like sacrilege to leave, even for a few minutes, a thing you had given me, in that person's hands. . . . I had a struggle with her to get the stick, and in the trial of strength the cane got broken. Ah! I only wish I had broken it across her shoulders! That's all. I went off furious. I did not choose to come home at once. I wanted to walk off my anger. I was thoroughly ashamed of myself. I didn't like, as soon as I came in, to give you so humiliating an explanation. I did not dare. I hid my cane, intending to have it quietly mended, and nobody the wiser."

"Why did you fling it into the fire when I gave it back to you?"

"I was wrong. I see it now. But you see I felt as if this having it secretly mended, by your orders, was a reproach I could not bear. I could not control my impulses. Of course, it was ridiculous.

I beg your pardon, my darling. You must make me another present, and I will take better care of it. Meantime, don't be angry with me—indeed, you ought not. I give you my word of honor, I am so anxious never to give you any cause to be grieved with me any more, that that ought to efface all my past sins. For, indeed, I am telling you the truth. Look me full in the face as much as you please, you will not find me afraid to meet your eyes. *Tiens* ; see, now, if I look afraid !”

He opened his eyes to their full extent. And it was true he did not seem to have the slightest fear. His mouth, half open, was tremulous with ardent, tender feeling. His eyes, which two hours earlier had had the brilliancy of drunkenness, had slept it off, and were bright and clear again.

Gabrielle saw in her husband all the lost beauty of the early days of their married life, and the years that had preceded it ; that juvenile charm she had so often gazed at and admired when, as a young girl, she said to herself that she must love him with more than a sister's love if she were to fulfill the mission imposed on her by old Monsieur de Monterey, her guardian.

If Gaston were sincere in his repentance and true in his explanations, was it not delightful to think that with a good conscience he had regained the early beauty of his face ?

Beauty is not infrequently an argument for goodness.

Gabrielle was weary of her struggle. She wished so much to be convinced, that she forgot all the reasons she had for not being so ; nor was she aware that she more readily believed all these extraordinary explanations because they were accented, underlined as it were, by kisses on her hands and on her arms, though not upon her mouth ;—he did not dare.

She let two big tears fall ; they were proofs of her weakness and of her surrender ; and, laying her head upon her husband's breast, she said, with angelic gentleness :

“ Ah ! if you are deceiving me this time, I shall die.”

Then Gaston for the first time in his life knew what true love was. He had not before understood it, now he understood. *Blasé* and indolent and selfish as he was, either fear or remorse softened him, and he felt a new light dawn into his soul. Though his smiles had been false, the tears he shed were true. He wept because he could not help himself under the influence of those soft, moist eyes, in which he read forgiveness.

"Ah! if for the future I ever cause you another sorrow, dear!" he said, "I shall kill myself!"

Gabrielle accepted this show of feeling as a proof of truth.

She had had more questions to ask, but she could not put another. Was she therefore a coward? She was simply a wife. And that evening she went to her bed intoxicated by her happiness, having dried with kisses the first genuine tears on her husband's part that had ever responded to her own.

The most consummate hypocrite may have, in hours of great danger, involuntary ebullitions of feeling, which may really serve his cause, because at least they are genuine.

I have always thought that Tartuffe must have deceived *himself*, and that he could never have played his *rôle* of impostor so perfectly unless he were acting under an illusion, and was unconscious that he was acting.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

THE next morning Madame de Monterey wanted to analyze her impressions of the day before.

She thought over, in her own mind, all that Gaston had detailed to her, and recalled how each answer to her questions had been made promptly and with full assurance by her husband. His tone had been even more satisfactory than his words.

She had kept in one corner of her memory the name and address of the woman whom Gaston professed to have visited with Monsieur Henri des Arbois. When her husband had been speaking, and while she was still unconvinced, she had said to herself (and she had said aloud to him) that she would see this woman and find out the truth of his story.

But, when in the morning she asked herself if she really should have courage to make any such inquiry at her house, she found her threat had been ridiculous. Under what pretext could she go there to find out if her husband had been deceiving her? What could she say to excuse her visit? And most likely the actress would decline to see her.



"But I might find out if there is really such a person!" she said, making a compromise with her curiosity.

But how would it help her if she did find out that in such a street, at such a number, such a lady lived? Gaston would probably have given the name of a real woman and a real address.

And this would not prove, even if she found his information so far correct, that he had been to her house at three o'clock in the morning.

Besides, at the bottom of her heart, Madame de Monterey shrank from any such inquiry. The day before, she had said to herself that she could be as brave as the wife of Jean Mortier. But she dared not feel sure that she had the same faith in her husband. She felt a repugnance to imitating the wife of the man arrested; wishing to avoid all analogy between their two households.

She sent out and bought a paper.

There was more in it about the confrontation the day before, and its consequences.

Jean Mortier, it said, was utterly despondent, and made no more protestations of his innocence. There could be no doubt that he was guilty. His looks, as well as a few despairing words that had escaped him, amounted to the same thing as a confession.

The probable date of the trial was also given.

Unless on the same night, in the same way, two exactly similar crimes had been committed, Madame de Monterey would be forced to believe herself the dupe of her own fears, and, yielding to the evidence, might give up all inquiry.

Gabrielle decided that their journey must begin immediately—the very next day. Her proneness to suspicion had, perhaps, she argued, been a kind of insanity. By change of air she might get out of that unwholesome atmosphere, cure herself of that dreadful fever, and get rid of the anguish that remained, even though now she was satisfied as to the truth.

Gaston that day was gentle and conciliating, just as he had been the previous evening. He was equally gay at breakfast-time. But Gabrielle contrived to keep him within bounds, and not to let him drink so much as the day before.

When they rose from the table, she said she was going out.

"Shall I go with you?" said her husband, gallantly.

"If I were going out to take a walk, I should be very glad of your company," she said, laughing; "but I am going to make a

visit that generally you do not care to make. I am going to see Monsieur Henrion."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Oh! not to ask him to take measures for a legal separation, . . . though I might make out a case against you, after your confession! But it is, on the contrary, to get the means for our keeping always with each other."

"What do you mean?"

"I want him to get us letters of credit for Switzerland, and perhaps for Italy."

"Shall we start at once?"

"To-morrow, if we can manage it."

"Then you think nothing need keep us in Paris?"

"I think we are as free as boys are in the holidays."

"You did not think so last night—"

"I was wrong; and, besides, you have made me jealous. I don't want you to go back and see the fair lady who broke your cane—"

Gabrielle smiled. Gaston gave back the smile, as rippling water reflects a light upon its waves.

"You cruel woman," he answered; "I thought you had quite forgiven me."

"Of course I have. But absolution is never given without penance. What I impose is, that you must submit to my little jokes."

Monsieur de Monterey was very anxious to go with his wife. He assured her that he had the greatest regard for Monsieur Henrion, and owed him several visits.

Was he afraid that Gabrielle wanted to go out alone in order to visit the actress in question? He fancied a sort of threat in the gayety of her last words.

Gabrielle persisted in refusing her husband's arm.

She went straight to Monsieur Henrion's. Her arrangements to secure money for the journey were soon made.

Monsieur Henrion greatly approved of traveling. He believed in Gaston's reformation. He had always looked forward to it, he said, with old-fashioned gallantry. He had always known that the good angel at his fireside would end by conquering the demon of dice and cards.

Incidentally, and because Gabrielle herself led the way to the subject, they talked about the affair in the Bois de Boulogne; but

of course Monsieur Henrion had no suspicion (could have none) of the all-powerful interest that Madame de Monterey took in the story.

Gabrielle was charmed, and reassured exceedingly, by this direct involuntary testimony to the innocence of her husband.

When oracles are wanted they can always be found.

And yet before she went home, prompted by a resolve to put an end forever to all anxiety, and to make it impossible that doubts should ever return, Madame de Monterey was determined to take one final step to reassure herself completely—a step solemn and decisive, the result of which would be something that no future excited feelings ever could gainsay.

She hesitated between two visits.

She was not thinking of going to the address of that other woman.

That would have been a miserable way of giving ease to her own mind—degrading alike to her husband and herself. Though it might prove Gaston innocent, it would leave a stain upon his wife.

But since she had Madame Jean Mortier's address, why might she not, under a pretext of comforting her in her grief, go and judge of the effect produced upon the upholsterer's wife by that terrible scene at the morgue as related in the papers?

In spite of herself, Gabrielle was always fancying herself in presence of the frail woman, with her energetic looks and eager words, who had given her so perfect an example of wifely faith, courageous love, and true heroism.

This wife, this mother, was a rival with whom she felt that she would like to measure herself once more. She did not now dread her as an enemy, and she hoped with all her heart that she never might be forced to act as hers.

Monsieur Henrion lived in the Rue Tronchet. As she left his house and was passing the Madeleine, Madame de Monterey paused. Carriages blocked up the street. She went up the steps into the church.

Gabrielle was naturally inclined to piety, though she had not the mystical faith of Madame Jean Mortier. Since her marriage her life had been divided, as it were, into two equal parts—that is, between personal efforts to control her feelings, and warm impulses of trust in God; into efforts to preserve her happiness and efforts to preserve her honor.

This morning it was the turn for the spirit of piety.

The Madeleine is still the Temple of Glory and of Victory. It never inspires or satisfies ideas of despondency. Nothing in the building seems to call upon its worshipers to seek for aid or comfort, everything speaks of strength to be increased and deeds of courage done. The long white flight of steps that leads up to the church seems to symbolize a triumphant ascension. Within, all speaks of earthly hope, and the marble apotheosis of the great saint, who had once been the sinner who loved much, is not calculated to impair this human feeling. The marble, the gilding, and the paintings give no hint of poverty, but rather show forth the power of riches applied to the service of God.

In some old, dark, damp church Gabrielle might perhaps have fallen back into her fears, or, if we may not call them fears, at least into mistrust, in spite of reason, in spite of appearances. But the magnificent church revived her drooping confidence.

The altar was dressed with flowers. A rich wedding was going on. The bride and bridegroom, kneeling upon velvet at the feet of the glorified and repentant Magdalene, were awaiting the benediction about to be pronounced over the union of two fortunes and two risks for happiness.

The organ was swelling forth magnificently the wedding march.

It had been in that very church, with the same pomp, before the same artificial flowers, before the same marble image of the repentant Magdalene, to the strains of the same music, to the murmur of the same words in which the priest proclaimed the duties of husband and wife, that Gabrielle had herself been married.

She now watched as a spectator the ceremony she had not seen when she herself was its heroine, and as she went over all its details she felt in them a strange charm.

When she had knelt there, trembling at the sound of the same organ, eight years before, she had with a beating heart vowed before God that she would be a devoted wife, her husband's guardian angel. She renewed that vow that day, as Christians renew their vows of baptism. She repeated to herself, with a conviction which was somewhat like self-righteous pride, that she had kept her vow; that she would always keep it; that she was strong enough to continue what was already begun.

She waited until mass was over to see the marriage procession pass out of the church; to read the face of the young bride; to see if she had prayed as she herself had done; to exhort her by an en-

couraging smile to be a self-denying wife ; to gain from the smile of this happy, new-made wife fresh strength for herself and fresh illusions.

The married pair were perfectly commonplace. They were Parisians of no high social standing. Gabrielle thought them noble in their confidence in the future, and in their acceptance of its duties, for she wanted to see in them a reflection of herself.

She trod on the rich red-velvet carpet behind the procession, and went down the marble steps as if she had been an invited guest—one of the friends of these young people, whose very names she did not care to know.

She followed the wedding party out of the church. She saw it drive off, and then, suddenly stopping a passing carriage, she made a choice between the two visits she had had upon her mind.

She did not drive to the Bois de Boulogne, but, in a low, sweet voice, to the great amazement of her driver, she said :

“ To the morgue.”

Madame de Monterey now felt herself strong enough to venture, for her own sake and her husband's, whom she associated with herself, on braving that ordeal, that judgment of God, which she had scorned only yesterday, and yet which came back into her thoughts—a piece of superstition.

Yes, she wanted to stand beside the murdered man ; as if before a judgment-seat she would enter that horrible place about which she knew nothing, but where the dead seemed to have power over the living, and, as she drove toward it, she kept saying to herself, substituting herself for Gaston :

“ I shall not faint when I look upon him. If I bear it without flinching it will prove that we are innocent.”

The people who frequent the morgue, and those led there by curiosity, were very much astonished to see a lady elegantly dressed get out of a carriage. She seemed agitated by none of the feelings of a mother, a daughter, a wife, or a sweetheart, the women who came there usually seeking husband or parent, a child or a lover.

This lady gently, politely, and composedly asked a *sergent-de-ville*, who was on duty, if it was through that great door she was to go in ?

He drew back with a respect that was neither pity nor sympathy, but a sort of grave astonishment.

When she reached the great glass partition behind which are

shown those who have made shipwreck of their lives; Gabrielle for a moment felt a horror—a great dread—which prevented her from seeing anything.

It was an awful thing to stand before those spectral forms exposed for recognition. Two men lay there stretched out at full length between a woman and a child.

By degrees Madame de Monterey grew used to the sight, and could let her gaze rest steadily upon it. She did not think she saw the man whom she had come to find. None of these four had any wounds upon the head. One was an old man greatly emaciated, a mere skeleton, wasted by poverty. They must have found him in some back street, dead of hunger. The other was young, and his jaws seemed to have stiffened as if, in death, he had fiercely uttered a blasphemous word. He had probably been drawn out of the Seine. These two poor creatures were the victims of that great anonymous homicide who is never brought to justice.

Could they have already buried or carried away Pierre Mortier? Gabrielle felt an almost bitter disappointment, as if the law had been unjust to her in refusing her the confrontation that she came to find.

She asked for the keeper of the place; he referred her to the actuary, who told her that the public exhibition of the victim, having no longer any object, since the confrontation with the prisoner had taken place, Pierre Mortier's remains had been placed in a side-room, where they were waiting for the legal *post-mortem* examination.

"So that I can not see him?" asked Madame de Monterey, with a little shudder.

"It is against the rules, madame, but the *post-mortem* is not yet begun."

"Then, monsieur, let me go in."

"I have no orders. You understand that it is impossible I should gratify mere curiosity."

"Oh! I assure you, monsieur, my motive is not curiosity."

"Is madame a relation? . . . Has she come to claim the body?"

"No, I am not any relation, but I am greatly interested in the wife of the man accused of killing him. . . . I have come here in the interest of justice. What harm can it do the prosecution to let me see him? . . . I could have seen him here two days ago, if I had come. I assure you, monsieur, I have very serious reasons—"

"Then I am sorry, madame, that you did not apply to the *juge d'instruction*."

This objection made Gabrielle tremble. What reasons for this step could she have given to the *juge d'instruction*?\* Would he have been satisfied with anything vague?

She saw that her curiosity might appear strange, almost the result of a depraved taste, if she did not more clearly explain herself. She did as many people do when pushed too hard in argument, she took refuge in the power of her own name. She told the man who she was, adding that, of course, that was no reason for admitting her, but that he might well suppose that a lady in her social position would not have come there to gratify useless curiosity.

She was risking a good deal in saying this, and she could go no further.

The man at the morgue had not often visitors of that description. He had done his duty as a public officer; as a man, he might feel himself at liberty to grant something to a pretty woman.

For gallantry may be found in very queer places. Executioners have been known to make it a point of honor to treat with great politeness women of distinction on the scaffold.

The actuary (I dare not call him a director, for he directs nothing) introduced Gabrielle into a side-room, less solemn, but not less horrible, than the great hall, and, showing her a corpse stretched out upon a table, no longer behind glass, but face to face with her, and in the same atmosphere, said:

"This is it, madame," and bowed.

Madame de Monterey, pale but firm, drew as near to the table as possible. She had an intrepidity of which she never would have believed herself capable. Claspings her hands, which hung down before her, she looked steadily at the corpse, naked and horrible, just passing into the first stages of decomposition.

She seemed to say to it:

"You shall not frighten me!"

She looked at it with no feeling of compassion, but rather with anger. For three minutes there was a sort of silent challenge between this young wife, who forced herself to gaze on this revolting object, hideous even in life, when the great veins were blue,

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\* The *juge d'instruction* is the legal officer who, in France, gets up the case for the prosecution.—TRANSLATOR.

more hideous in death, when the veins showed under the skin, which seemed covered with a network of black snakes—a coarse, rough man, threatening her as he lay there in his horror.

After a general examination, Gabrielle bent over his head.

"Are these the wounds made by the hammer?" she asked the actuary.

"Yes, madame; an upholsterer's hammer," replied the man, with another bow.

Little did he think he was making himself the ally of Gabrielle, the defender of her husband.

Madame de Monterey eagerly examined the size of the wounds, and, in her thoughts, compared them with the little hammer on the cane that had disappeared in the ashes; she knew its size exactly.

Probably it would have fitted as nearly as the upholsterer's hammer had done the fracture in the skull, and the great bloody bruises which proved that he had been murdered; but Gabrielle, when she felt herself not inclined to faint like Jean Mortier, when no revulsion of her whole being took place, when she kept her self-possession in presence of that dreadful corpse that cried for vengeance, said to herself that now she was certain her husband was not guilty, nor could he be, since she, his other self, had not been terrified like Jean Mortier, since nothing had made her shudder, and the corpse had only roused in her the instinctive repugnance which such a sight must give to any woman.

Yes, she had gone through the ordeal, she had sustained the judgment of God! She believed in that old test with her whole soul. She had borne it without shrinking. It proved her husband innocent; and all it could do now was to condemn her to deep repentance for her own base suspicions.

With what fervency she thanked God for having so visibly made known the truth to her! Alas! we so easily believe in the hand of Providence when all is in our favor.

"Thank you, monsieur," she said to the actuary.

She left behind an offering for those poor creatures who might come to reclaim the bodies of friends who had been driven to suicide by poverty; and this gift disposed of any remaining scruples on the part of the functionary who had allowed her to have this terrible silent interview with the dead.

Pale, but perfect mistress of herself, though solemnized as we



must all be when we leave the presence of death, she left the hall, and passed out of the morgue with the dignity of a priestess.

Once outside, she lightened her bosom by a long, deep sigh, which floated up to heaven like an offering of thanksgiving, and then she got again into her carriage with singular excitement in her veins.

When she got home, she ran and kissed her husband with a transport of renewed or possibly new love.

"I have my money," she said, gayly; "we shall have enough for a delightful journey, and let us start to-morrow!"

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE INDICTMENT DRAWN UP.

THE next day, however, a letter from the *Palais de Justice* prevented their departure. Monsieur de Monterey was desired to present himself during the day in the office of a certain *juge d'instruction*.

Though this summons had not been exactly foreseen, it was so natural that Gabrielle did not feel alarmed by it.

Gaston merely seemed annoyed at the delay.

"I have nothing to tell," he cried. "All I can do is to repeat that I know nothing."

"You saw him, however, at supper—getting drunk," said Gabrielle.

"True; when a man is drunk, he can fall into any kind of snare."

It was at luncheon, at table, that Gaston spoke thus, and to get over his annoyance he did the same thing he had done on the day that he took Roger for a walk—he drank more wine than usual, exciting himself till he left the table almost tipsy; but, having become under the influence of liquor heroic and generous, he said to Gabrielle:

"You are right. I shall make a great point of his drunkenness. The beast, no doubt, threatened his cousin. Perhaps the poor upholsterer asked him to lend him some money, and he refused him brutally. I shall tell the *juge d'instruction* that that is what I

think. *Ma foi*, he wasn't interesting enough to make much fuss about; he was a great red, impudent, greedy, selfish, ugly country man. Ah! if you had only seen him yourself, my dear!"

Gabrielle had seen him; she had seen him more horrible than he had looked when Gaston saw him—stark, swollen, stretched out on a table waiting for the scalpel, hideous, threatening, and in a state of putrefaction—and she compared that dreadful vision, not with her husband's delicate features, but with the unknown face, seen only in imagination of Jean Mortier; the loving husband of that little woman, so intelligent, so full of tender pity, and she felt herself sympathizing with her husband's aversion for the victim, and all her pity going out toward the murderer, admitting that Jean Mortier were really the man.

Yes—this was the result of having seen this peasant Hercules: of course, the upholsterer had been threatened, challenged, and struck first; that was all clear. In self-defense he had struck back; he had not been an intentional murderer.

The circumstance of the robbery did not present itself to Gabrielle's imagination at the moment.

She would probably remember it later, and in the casuistry of her faith she would find some way to explain the circumstance so as to find in it an extenuation, instead of an aggravation of the crime.

"Tell all that to the *juge d'instruction*," she said, finding in her husband's words more things than he had ever thought of.

"Never fear," said Gaston, with self-importance; "we must try to save the poor fellow."

"Ah! I should be delighted to do so."

Gaston's echo of that "ah!" was so genuine, so earnest, that it penetrated into Madame de Monterey's soul, and might have aroused her stifled doubts, but that Monsieur de Monterey was in one of his enthusiastic moods, a little overexcited, perhaps, and this explained his ardor.

"Yes," Gabrielle went on, "it would indeed be a good action. We must save him for his own sake, for he is not really a bad man, and for his wife and for his little child."

Gaston must have found his wife very persuasive. There were tears in his eyes.

"How good you are!" he murmured, much moved.

"You see," she resumed, "there will be sorrow enough in that

poor household to punish the crime committed, without the intervention of human punishment."

And she added the counterpart of a late remark of Gaston's :

" Ah ! if you had only seen his wife ! "

" Is she pretty ? " asked the handsome De Monterey, laughing.

" She has great courage. She has resolution enough to bring the murderer to repentance (if she ever comes to the belief that her husband is the murderer). I pained her because I could not sufficiently believe in her husband's innocence. I want to repair that wrong. Oh, Gaston ! let us save him ! "

" But it does not depend on us, dear. "

" I know it ; but among the witnesses who will testify (and there are not many), you, from your position in the world, will be one of the most important. The notary, in whose office the quarrel commenced, may be able to corroborate you. He may have noticed the ferocity of that wild beast of a man. Ah ! he was the one who might have been a murderer for a few thousand franc-notes ! "

By degrees this good woman was working herself up to the point of excusing the murderer, and almost of making out that there had been no great harm in the crime—so dreadful to her was the remembrance of what she had seen of the murdered man.

Gaston loudly professed an entire agreement with his wife, and went off to wait upon the *juge d'instruction*.

At the last minute of this *tête-à-tête*, at the very moment of his departure, Gabrielle, indeed, was a little disquieted by the self-confidence of her husband—a confidence, however, with which she had inspired him. He went off to the fight with a boastful kind of swagger, as if he were going utterly to annihilate the man who had been found dead.

Gabrielle became afraid that he might go too far ; that he might push his testimony in the prisoner's favor into paradox, and, though she experienced none of the agonies that had been now laid at rest, she was anxious all the time that her husband was away.

He reassured her, as soon as she saw him return, by the triumphant gleam in his eyes, and by his bearing.

He had found that the *juge d'instruction* was an old school-fellow ; a man he knew, also, at the club ; a charming man ; who had understood him at the first word, and who had been much struck by what he said of the ignoble appearance of Pierre Mortier.

The magistrate had even gone so far as to confess his own disgust at the sight of the victim. He had noted down carefully all the details given him by Monsieur de Monterey.

"*Ma foi!*" cried Gaston, boyishly, when he had told all about his visit to the *juge d'instruction*, "I really believe the acquittal of that good fellow is now certain!"

"Ah!" replied Madame de Monterey, sadly, "it is not sure. I can only hope we may save his head."

This reflection made Gaston turn pale. May be his vanity was hurt at the idea that he might fail to do more than save his *protégé* from the guillotine.

"His head—his head!" he muttered as if frightened, raising his hand to his own neck.

"We must get him a good lawyer," cried Gabrielle, eagerly.

"That is no business of ours."

"Yes it is, if we wish to save him."

"We have no right to mix ourselves up too much in such an affair."

"Everybody has a right to be charitable."

"Of course; but we must not compromise ourselves."

"Compromise ourselves?" cried Gabrielle, with a start.

"I might seem to have borne false witness," said Gaston, alarmed, "if I appeared to wish to save him at any price. Believe me, we must be prudent, very prudent—very prudent."

Gaston de Monterey exhorting any one to prudence was something unheard of up to that day, but the occasion was too serious to make it a laughing matter.

On the contrary, Gabrielle became somewhat thoughtful. Instinctively she felt that his commiseration for the prisoner was excessive, and not altogether natural.

Her husband took advantage of her silence to go to his own chamber.

As he went out of the *salon*, where this conversation had taken place, he knocked himself so awkwardly and so violently against the door that his wife said to herself, with horror, that his semi-intoxication at luncheon had been increased by the open air.

But from a vague odor that floated, after he left the room, around her, and which came from Gaston's breath, she began to understand the situation, and said to herself that her husband, when he left the *juge d'instruction*, must have gone into some *café* and added a

fresh and most imprudent dose of alcohol to the wine that had already put his brain into a state of commotion.

She could no longer struggle against the fact that she was getting rid of one vice by letting in another.

"I will cure him of this . . . later," sighed she, "when we can get away, and when this affair is over."

Why did she sigh so deeply?

Was she so terribly afraid of this sudden propensity of Gaston's—a propensity to drink, and to excite his brain?

Or was it that the fatal stone of Sisyphus had fallen back upon her—that stone that she so dreaded, that she thought she had surely pushed out of her path; was she forever to be associated by inexorable Fate with this affair? Could she only be set free when the doom of Jean Mortier should be determined?

Why, then, did she dread this unhappy man's condemnation as if it were a misfortune that threatened herself?

Why was it that, the less uncertainty she felt as to his guilt, the more sadness seemed to settle down upon her?

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE TRIAL.

THE newspapers were right. The labors of the *juge d'instruction* were short and quickly over, and the murder committed in March was to be tried in July.

This was astonishing celerity. Seldom had the law made so few delays.

Of course, the newspapers attributed this to their own influence over the magistrates. Without it, they said, without the daily pressure exercised by the public press, the affair might have dragged on a long time; but they had taken much pains to demonstrate that any delay would be an outrage upon public morality, and would imperil the security of society, and that Jean Mortier's silence or his melodramatic protestations of innocence were mere snares and delusions. The reporters had so thoroughly got up the case, the press was an auxiliary so essential to justice, that any delay in the affair was a sort of insult to all concerned.

The chamber of *Mises en Accusation*, where indictments were drawn up, was most careful not to place itself in opposition to public opinion, represented by the opinion of the newspapers.

The affair of the murder in the Bois de Boulogne was assigned on the docket for the first fortnight in July. It was also announced that the best criminal lawyer in Paris had undertaken the difficult task of defending the prisoner.

It always seems as if, by especial natural selection or inspiration, counsel accept or choose the clients they are going to defend.

The best-informed journals did not fail to state that Maître Lacaille, the most illustrious counsel in desperate cases, had come forward of his own accord to offer to Jean Mortier the honor of his services.

Even the best-informed journals do not always get at the exact truth. The facts were these:

A priest from the Madeleine, as the work of the *juge d'instruction* was drawing to a close, went to visit Madame Jean Mortier, and informed her that a charitable person, who wished to avoid all thanks by being strictly anonymous, had charged him to put into the hands of the poor young wife and mother such a sum as might be necessary to secure the services of a powerful lawyer.

Emilienne had been tempted at first to refuse this offer. She shrank from charity. She wanted, above all things, to know whose hand had been stretched out to aid her. Perhaps it was the very hand that had slain their cousin!

"No; I give you my word that you are wrong!" exclaimed the priest, with the most evident sincerity.

Besides, as we already know, Emilienne was a religious woman. She bowed her own will before the authority of the Church.

After her first hesitation, which was that of a sentinel upon his post, she accepted—and accepted eagerly—help which enabled her to do her duty as a wife and mother.

She went to see Maître Lacaille, and asked him to undertake her husband's defense.

I ought to say here, for the honor of the bar, that, when Madame Mortier began to speak of fees, the lawyer stopped her with a very proud and noble wave of his hand.

"First of all, let us think of saving your husband," he said; "that is my affair. The other matter I leave to my secretary, and you can speak to him about it the day after the verdict."

Emilienne hoped she had infused her own faith into the great lawyer. She saw him again, a few days after he had minutely examined the papers in the case.

Though he admitted that the affair was very grave, he had a ray of hope, and Emilienne put faith in his visible self-satisfaction.

"You see yourself, do you not," she said, "that he is innocent?"

The lawyer answered by the exclamation:

*"Parbleu!"*

She could get nothing more out of him. To her it seemed a laconic, synthetic, but decided form of conviction.

Could Emilienne have suspected that the satisfaction she saw in her lawyer's face was the delight of an artist when he sees a difficult piece of work before him, or of a surgeon called in to perform a rare operation? The opportunity before him was superb; the question of the prisoner's life or death was quite a secondary consideration.

Nor did Emilienne know that the first care of a lawyer is to protect himself from any chance of being deceived by his clients; and that, even when he believes implicitly in the innocence of the prisoner whose defense he has undertaken, he had better not say so openly, that he may not be embarrassed on some other occasion, when his defense will have to be founded only on a supposition.

Perhaps doubt is, after all, the secret of genius—the axe of Phocion—for orators at the bar. Perhaps, too, great orators, like great generals, fight the best fight, and make the strongest disposition of their forces, when they know in their secret souls that they risk a defeat—a defeat which, though just in itself, would be unjust to their ability.

Madame Mortier got nothing but indefinite exclamations from her counsel, but she was anxious at least to know if he felt certain of success.

At this he assumed the reserved attitude proper to men of science or of exceptional knowledge. He replied that he ought to succeed, but that there was always a risk. Counsel might not always be able to get the better of the ignorance or the prejudices of a jury. At all events, he felt certain he could assure her that her husband would escape the scaffold.

This assurance was a dreadful shock to the brave woman. For an innocent man to be sent to the galleys was, in her eyes, not less dreadful than the guillotine.

"Then," she said, solemnly, "you are not sure of saving our good name—our honor?"

The lawyer, when asked this question, in a tone in which it might have been put by a Cornelia, made a vague, uncertain gesture—for he was much embarrassed how to reply.

"Then," said Emilienne, "I shall be a widow." She said not a word more, leaving the lawyer in doubt whether she believed her husband would commit suicide, or whether in her desire to save her own honor she would give up her husband if condemned, and claim a divorce legally.

Public opinion, meantime, had made up its mind.

Nobody had any doubt of Jean Mortier's guilt. It was perfectly apparent. But his wife and child, and everything brought to light concerning his personal character, his honorable antecedents, anecdotes about which were collected by the newspapers, excited general sympathy.

The romantic tendencies of the public always make it take an interest in a criminal.

Men could not say he was not guilty, but they hoped he would escape punishment.

There were no implacable demands for his conviction (till that of the imperial prosecutor should be brought forth) except in a few journals, prints that slash at everything with a celestial sword.

These saw in this crime another proof of the execrable influence exerted by liberal ideas among the masses, by the Utopias of progress, and by demands for social reform.

Novel-writers and political economists were cited as this murderer's accomplices.

Jean Mortier belonged, these writers said, to that class of workmen called *sublimes*, who think themselves above their proper place in life, who are anxious to be rich, to enjoy themselves, and who find all means of acquisition permissible because they have no Christian resignation.

Against this picture of the city artisan, envious, jealous, demoralized by detestable publications, and by theatres, and, in this instance, by the constant sight of luxuries he could never hope to enjoy, these honest prints drew a companion sketch of the idyllic life of the agriculturist. Pierre Mortier stood for Abel because he sold sheep, and Jean Mortier was Cain, because he inhabited the Bois de Boulogne.



Monsieur de Monterey was the only one of the gentlemen, who had supped at the restaurant that night, who was called upon to testify.

He was annoyed at this preference, which was due probably to mere chance. His habit of going to the restaurant had caused his name to be given first; and there had been no time to summon Monsieur Henri des Arbois before his sudden departure.

The women whom the police had interrogated had not been thought worthy to lend any aid to justice. Who knows what might have come of it if one of them had happened to mention that when Pierre Mortier was making a display of his pocket-book, there sat close beside him a "cleaned-out" gambler, who was being mocked at for his ill-luck by his companions? The rapidity with which all suspicion had concentrated itself on the upholsterer had prevented any attention being paid to what had passed among the fashionable gamblers who had been sitting near the peasant's table. What might not have come to light if any one had thought of asking at what club Gaston de Monterey had taken his revenge?

The declarations of the notary; the conversation overheard in the office between the two cousins; the night passed by the upholsterer away from his own home, the letter he had received, and the hammer that had been found, together with other circumstances had made so strong a case of presumptive evidence against him, that not for one moment had there been any thought of seeking elsewhere for Pierre Mortier's murderer.

Gaston, indeed, hoped to escape the annoyance of giving testimony before the court at the trial. But Jean Mortier's counsel, having been informed of Monsieur de Monterey's kind feelings toward the prisoner, and hoping to make good use of what he would testify concerning the drunken condition in which Pierre left the restaurant, had him set down among the witnesses for the defense.

When Gaston found himself cast for this part, he was rather flattered. His conscience was relieved. Since Jean Mortier's counsel invoked his aid to help his client, he would do all in his power by his answers to his questions to assist in procuring the acquittal of the upholsterer.

Gaston had returned to his club. His entire reformation would have set people talking. But he gave up cards. He only got intoxicated, and it was thought quite natural that, having lost all his

money, he should have pride enough not to borrow from the Jews, nor play on credit.

Gabrielle, who had hoped for his total reformation, was sorry, but not in despair. At the bottom of her soul, perhaps, she might have been tempted to attribute his too stupendous reformation to remorse. Her husband's bad habits seemed to her an additional proof of his innocence. And, besides, she was resolved to fight against his new passion for drink when they were traveling, when they were out of Paris, when the trial should be over.

In point of fact, their journey might have been commenced. But, suddenly, neither Gabrielle nor Gaston seemed to wish to be gone. The summons from the *juge d'instruction* had smitten them both with a sort of paralysis of the will, and had made them inert and inactive; all their thoughts were of the drama in which, by the will of the law, Gaston had become an actor, or at least a theatrical supernumerary.

If Gabrielle had been the person who had made use of the services of a priest from the Madeleine, to enable Emilienne to choose and pay for the best counsel, she had avoided any personal contact with the wife of Jean Mortier.

Yet, several times in a carriage and alone, escaping secretly, as it were, from her own house, she had been driven to Boulogne, and had passed slowly along the street on which the upholsterer's shop was situated; looking gravely, with a beating heart (taking care not to be herself seen), at the little windows of the rooms over the shop, where she fancied she could see the shadow of a woman, bending over her work—the pale and resolute Emilienne Mortier.

In these strange drives, Gabrielle had more than once been tempted suddenly to stop her carriage, to get out, to go up-stairs, to fling herself into the arms of Emilienne, and to cry aloud:

"I am come to weep with you, to hope with you, to suffer with you! I want to share your sorrows."

But each time she had resisted the temptation. She had driven on—carrying away with her, in her heart, the remembrance of that shut-up house, with anxiety and shame, as if she were impelled to feel responsible for the grief within.

At last, the day fixed for the trial arrived.

Gabrielle, by the help of Monsieur Henrion, had obtained a ticket of admission to the platform behind the judges—one of the best seats—where she found herself surrounded by elegant people.

The chivalrous politeness of Pierre Daudin, who offered to give the ladies the pleasure of seeing a man put to the torture, has its imitators in our own day. Prisoners are, of course, no longer dropped upon by water, drop by drop, nor stretched upon the rack ; but, after the mysterious agonies of their secret examination in prison, they have torments enough to suffer in public to interest any number of sensitive women.

Gabrielle brought more emotion with her to the court than she expected to find. She came to it as she had gone to the morgue. She wished to see, though she did not own it to herself, if the judgment of men confirmed, or would set aside, the judgment of God.

She wanted, also, to hear her husband give his testimony.

That morning she had carefully watched over him at luncheon, and had kept him in tolerable sobriety.

He was seated among the witnesses, irreproachable in dignity, in dress, in bearing, but a little pale, as a witness of his social importance might have been expected to be, when called upon to testify in a criminal case.

When the prisoner was brought in, he looked at him slowly and steadily, as if he wanted to know his features thoroughly, no doubt to enable himself to look at him without emotion.

Jean was very pale, but his color rose at intervals. His look coincided in the minds of the spectators with the idea that the public had already conceived of him.

He was not a confirmed scoundrel, he was not a depraved murderer ; he was what was called an *illuminé*, an enthusiast capable of anything, murder itself, in the paroxysm of some frenzy of desire or excitement. He trembled, not with fear, but from grief and humiliation. He looked all round the assembly, and had a sudden gleam of joy upon his face, and a quick smile, when he perceived Emilienne.

She had left her little Florence with the butcher's wife, and had come into court to sustain her husband by her love. Love gleamed in her eyes. It might give him courage, being innocent, to defy the blind cruelty of human justice to carry out its error to the bitter end !

She was the first person who had come into the hall, and she was sitting in the front row.

Her arms were crossed upon the balustrade that divided the public from the seats reserved for witnesses. She was motionless,

attentive, with her whole soul concentrated in her eyes. Those eyes wandered slowly from the prisoner's bench to the seat of the imperial prosecutor, as if, in spite of everything, she wanted to establish a subtle thread of sympathy, a current of generous feeling, between those two men, one of whom was about to demand the life of the other.

In her glance all round the court-room, Emilienne passed in review the judges first, and then behind the judges the people of fashion, who had obtained the privilege of tickets to what was expected to be a particularly moving spectacle.

A flash of anger and contempt came over her brilliant eyes, quick-covered by her drooping eyelids, when she thought how sentence of death would be the most pathetic ending to the drama, and, possibly, also more secretly satisfactory to all these curious men and women, than a mere commonplace acquittal.

She did not look much at the jurors; they could tell her nothing; and, somehow, she feared them less than the spectators, the prosecutor, or the judge.

She recognized Madame de Monterey, and her look faltered.

She remembered her own visit to the little hotel in the Rue d'Anjou, and the lady's incredulity, and yet her kindness, the sorrows of her life, which she had guessed at, and which seemed to draw them nearer together, and she asked herself, ought she to love or hate this woman, the wife of a witness, who was benevolent from necessity?

Why had that grand lady come there? Had she come, like all the rest, to satisfy her curiosity? To brave Emilienne? To defy her to prove the innocence of her husband?

She did not look cruel. Jean Mortier's wife saw her better now than she had done in the darkened room where they had talked together in the twilight. Gabrielle, who had raised her eyes to the ceiling, either with an instinct of looking up to heaven, or else to see the architecture, gave a sigh as she looked down again; that sigh Emilienne noticed and pondered upon.

Why should Madame de Monterey sigh? Was it a sigh of pity for the prisoner seated upon the "bench of infamy"? Was it compassion for his wife and child? Or was it merely because she was tired, and impatient for the trial to begin?

But no; Gabrielle's eye caught that of Emilienne, and across that distance of actual space (which seemed like a type of the real dis-

tance in their destiny) there was a recognition, an exchange of sympathy, an embrace between their souls.

The two women were both moved by it, and at the same instant passed their hands over their eyes to hide an emotion that had surprised them both, and humiliated their heroic souls.

They felt themselves sisters—sisters in sorrow and sisters in courage.

All this passed during the few minutes in which every one was settling into place, before the announcement of the bailiff, "The court is now in session!" and the first words of the judge.

The clerk read the indictment.

Jean Mortier listened to it with apparent indifference, but in his heart with melancholy disdain.

He would not allow himself to make any protest thus early in the case. He reserved his strength to answer the judge's questions, and to cross-examine the witnesses. Till then he was resolved to bow his head under the solemn slander droned out by the clerk. He bowed to it, as men bow to an adversary in the arena. He meant to fight against it with all his strength.

The reading of the indictment having come to an end, they proceeded to call over the names of the witnesses, who then retired, and the examinations began.

What is the use of giving all the details of the trial? Our readers know it all beforehand.

Jean related what we already know, protested his innocence, was careful to speak without violence, and, with a simple skill, showed as he spoke that he was by nature gentle, and incapable of an act of brutality such as the one of which he was accused.

He appealed to his honorable life, to his wife, and to his child, and, by a movement which was very eloquent, stretching out his arms before him he swore solemnly that those hands had never touched his hammer but for work, and never to commit a crime.

Then the witnesses, one by one, came in.

Maître Boisselot, the notary, was the first, and also the most dangerous.

He, however, testified that Jean Mortier had inspired him with much interest, that he had joined him in trying to obtain from the sole legatee some sign of generosity; but he was forced to admit that the despair of the upholsterer had been so great that he had not been able to help fearing some disaster.

The judge asked him to say more particularly what he had feared. He answered, "Suicide."

This supposition was less in Jean Mortier's favor than it seemed at first sight.

If the unhappy man had been seen in the first transports of grief and frenzy in such a state that thoughts of his family were not sufficient to bind him to existence, to keep him steadily in the beaten track of labor and resignation, was it not probable that he might have conceived the idea of killing his cousin as easily as that of killing himself?

The difference between these two murders was not so great as to arrest and bring back to reason a man who had forgotten his ties of father and husband, and what was due to himself.

Jean Mortier, being asked to explain this part of the deposition of the notary, did not hesitate to admit that he was in a state of mind at first in which he might very well have struck his cousin, and that all through that dreadful night he had wished himself dead.

The notary further deposed that the envelope, exhibited among what are called *les pièces de conviction*, seemed to him as if it were an envelope taken from his desk. His chief clerk, whom they were about to examine, would relate, he said, that Jean had undoubtedly offered his address to Pierre, and had written it on some kind of paper. But the identity of the envelope would prove little. It was certain that Pierre, if he had it, had carried it away with him, and whoever robbed him after the murder must have found it in his pocket with the bank-notes.

In short, the notary, while trying to be impartial, made the audience, at the very outset, see how very probable was the crime.

Jean must have exhausted all his powers of supplication upon Pierre, and then, maddened and exasperated, must have struck him without having premeditated the blow.

Maître Boisselot, who had a wise head on his shoulders, and a good many books of philosophy in his library, wound up his testimony with a sort of postscript, which very much impressed the jury.

He made the supposition that Jean, having committed the murder, had taken out of his cousin's pocket-book only the two thousand francs absolutely necessary for the urgent needs of his family; that having had a conscience that had been scrupulous up to that moment, he had, constrained by remorse, been influenced by a strange train of reasoning—that he had considered his robbery in

the light of a restitution. He might have considered himself less criminal because all the profit he derived from it was relief that was indispensable to his family. He had been satisfied with that small part of the inheritance which he had asked from his cousin in charity, and which Pierre Mortier, in his avarice, had refused.

This explanation the notary said had struck him, and he doubted not it would strike the gentlemen of the jury.

Is not the unhappy wretch acquitted who steals a loaf of bread from before a baker's stall for his wife and children? Undoubtedly, in this particular case, blood had been shed, but surely they would take into consideration the despair of this unhappy man, placed suddenly between the desire to possess money of which he ought lawfully to have received his share, and the ruin of his family.

Maitre Boisselot thought it his duty here to mention to the court and to the jury what had been the intentions of Monsieur Mortier-Fondard, the uncle who had left the will, a few days before his death. He had intended to give a favorable answer to the entreaty of the upholsterer. Jean must have suffered all the more because he had been made aware of his uncle's intention of assisting him.

Was it not natural that a man, so tender toward his wife and child, might have been impelled into that insanity in which murder had often been committed, by this cruel mockery of his expectations?

This way of extenuating the crime admitted it. The more excusable it was shown to be, the more certain it became.

The way in which this view of Maitre Boisselot's seemed to be accepted by those present roused Jean Mortier. As soon as he was permitted to make answer to the deposition, he protested eagerly against this view of the case.

"I suffered greatly," he said, with tears in his voice, "when I found I was not mentioned in my uncle's will. I suffered also from what I considered the hard-heartedness of my cousin. Ah! if I could only have guessed he would have repented of it! . . . But I suffer now three times as much from the reasons *monsieur le notaire* has brought forward to excuse me. No! I will have none of these extenuating circumstances! I am not half innocent and half guilty! No! If I had been capable of killing a man to rob him, I should have taken all he had; I would not have shed blood for two thousand francs only! *Monsieur le notaire* is right only on one

point. No trace of more than two thousand francs has been found in my house, nor will more ever be found there; and if you bring about my death, my wife and child will have no treasure that they can dig up and appropriate hereafter. . . . Ah! I hope that the wretch who ought to be where I now stand, will some day be discovered. There are some numbers of the bank-notes still preserved. . . . I pray Heaven that they may suffice for his conviction. Ah! gentlemen, do not let the discovery come too late—"

He stopped, for his emotion choked him.

Monsieur de Monterey, who was waiting his turn to be summoned, was in the witnesses' waiting-room, and so did not hear this expression of a passionate wish that the unknown murderer might be discovered. But Gabrielle was there. She shuddered at the words of Jean Mortier. Those numbers of the bank-notes were in her possession; she had them in her pocket at that very moment. Was it possible that, some day, some other clew might come to light besides those that had placed Jean Mortier on the "bench of infamy"?

Why did she shiver? Was she astonished that Jean Mortier would not confess? Had she fancied that he had confessed already?

She involuntarily strove to catch Emilienne's eye. But, though she could not directly catch it, for Emilienne was looking full at Jean, she caught its gleam, and she saw that the wife was upholding her husband, applauding his protestation, and renewing with him the promise of an absolute union in life, in death, in shame, or in honor.

Madame de Monterey was jealous of the firm confidence Emilienne had in her husband. Could she have exchanged the same look with Gaston?

Jean Mortier resumed:

"*Monsieur le notaire* does me injustice when, no doubt, out of kindness to me, he makes the supposition that I was disappointed enough about my uncle's will to have revenged myself upon my cousin. . . . I said to myself that it was partly my own fault that nothing had been left me. I am not a man to speculate, I am not a gambler who loses control of himself when he has lost his money."

As Jean said this, he looked full at the judge, and, as Gabrielle sat behind the judge, he looked at her too.

She lowered her eyes under his look. "I had grown accustomed," continued the upholsterer, "for a long time past, *always*



indeed, I may say, to have bad luck. It did not surprise me as much as you might suspect when I found myself disinherited. I loved my wife all the more for it—and my little girl. I felt that I was more needed than ever to earn bread for them; and, when a man has such feelings in his heart, he does not dishonor himself by poisoning the bread he is providing for his family. *Monsieur le president*," he added, turning to the judge, "there sits my wife; she does not fear to come here, because she knows that I am not afraid of anything that can be said of me before her. You can question her. She will tell you if I ever could have thought of giving her bread to eat that had been steeped in blood! . . . Is this true, Emilienne? Say!"

Jean spoke gently but proudly. His voice was not loud, but he raised it slightly, and spoke with eagerness.

He had turned toward Emilienne.

She, on this appeal, seemed to feel as if she were marked with a glowing seal, when she saw her husband's look turned on her. She sprang up in her place.

"Yes, it is true!" she cried, with a clear, steady voice.

Those around her drew back respectfully. The scene was pathetic, but it impaired the solemnity of the court-room.

The judge tapped softly on his desk, and, shaking his head, commanded silence.

One of the bailiffs likewise came forward, and by a *hush* that was polite, almost persuasive (bailiffs in the criminal court are as gentle as physicians with the incurable), he requested Madame Jean Mortier to be silent.

She obeyed. There was a whisper in the crowd; one could hardly have said of what nature, it was partly one of hesitating sympathy, partly one of curiosity and pity.

"Call the next witness!" said the judge.

Jean Mortier had sat down again; and his counsel, turning toward him, appeared to exhort him to control his emotion, and not to try the effect of any more such scenes upon the audience.

The great artist was probably afraid of weakening beforehand the peroration of his own speech.

The notary's chief clerk was heard after his master. He went into a long account of the conversation between the cousins; but he made no such comments as Maître Boisselot had done to satisfy the sense of justice.

The notary had seemed to have an eye to his future functions as *juge de paix*, if he should succeed in getting that appointment on giving up his present one; for, as it is the business of a *juge de paix* to do, he appeared to be trying to reconcile justice with conciliation.

This was why, probably, he had tried to make accusation and defense fit into each other, to the great prejudice of the man whom they most concerned.

After the chief clerk, who told nothing new, Monsieur de Monterey was called.

He came forward very properly, very dignified, and very pale, with that pallor that seems the enamel of dignity.

As he began by declaring that he knew nothing, absolutely nothing—that he did not know the prisoner and never had seen him till that morning—many persons present deemed his deposition hardly worth listening to, and a good deal of whispered conversation went on (comments on the last two witnesses), like foam upon the waves.

The lawyer for the defense, pushing his sleeves back, and rising to his feet, begged the witness to describe the looks and appearance of Pierre Mortier.

Gaston, who had begun well, in a manner that was cold but fluent, now appeared suddenly to hesitate.

He gave a pale smile as he looked up at the judge, which seemed to say: "What's the use? why need you ask disgusting details from a man like me?"

But the presiding judge, out of deference to the counsel for the defense, insisted, and desired him to give the court the details called for.

What Monsieur de Monterey had already said to Gabrielle—had committed to memory and knew perfectly by heart—all of a sudden seemed to grow mixed up in his memory. He stammered that he had not looked at Pierre Mortier attentively, and that he was afraid he might make erroneous statements, founded on a rapid impression.

Maitre Lacaille had to remind him of his previous depositions, and by degrees brought him back to the statements that he had then expressed with great freedom, concerning the bad, ferocious, defiant face of the murdered man.

Then, pushed to extremity, like a coward who wants to make amends for his own fear by unbecoming rashness, or like horses which run away after they have balked, and have been admonished

by the whip, he flung himself into his part, and said anything to the court that came into his head; he swore to himself that he would save the prisoner, no matter at what expense to the victim.

He therefore stood up boldly before judge and jury, took the attitude of an orator, and, as he was not accustomed to public speaking, kept passing his hat nervously from his right hand to his left, accenting some of his words vehemently. Growing animated, he was soon carried away by his subject, and by turns was emphatic and trivial.

"*Monsieur le president*," said he, among other things, "it is true that that man—the other man I mean—did not impress me favorably. . . . Oh, no! . . . I did not pay great attention to what he was saying, . . . but I heard enough to make out that he was boasting insolently about a legacy. And then he drank and drank, . . . it was a disgusting orgy. I should not have been surprised if he had had a fit of apoplexy. He might have killed himself by a fall; . . . but no, it appears he did not. I don't know, of course, what happened after supper. I went down-stairs with my friends. . . . I can only offer conjectures. . . . I am afraid it would be taking a liberty—"

"The bench is ready to hear you, monsieur?"

The judge's deference put an end to what little self-possession Gaston had left.

"Oh, you understand, *monsieur le president*, . . . what I said to monsieur, the *juge d'instruction*, whom I used to know formerly; he was one of my friends. It was easier to talk about this matter in his office, . . . than it is here. I am afraid I may take a liberty, . . . but never mind. . . . Yes, I did declare that the man, that unfortunate man, seemed to me to be a scoundrel; . . . if the word is too strong, I take it back. There can be no comparison between him and his cousin, whom I see here for the first time, but whose face is an excellent one. . . . I did say that no doubt that drunken wretch most probably had jostled, had knocked against, and insulted many men on the boulevard. . . . It is surprising he was not arrested and carried to the station. . . . How did he get as far as the Bois de Boulogne in that condition? . . . I can not tell. How did it happen he did not stumble and fall as he went along? . . . Well, if the prisoner really did follow him, I am very sure he did not do so with any idea of striking him. . . . Oh, no—no! I feel that I know that, . . . I can swear he never did!"

Gaston was very much more moved than any one could have expected. He passed his hand through his hair, and rubbed it up from his forehead; he twisted his fingers in it, as if to get out the electricity; and while all present, not a little surprised at this sudden ardor on the part of a witness, bent forward to listen to him, he went on:

"Ah! a man may soon turn into a murderer . . . in certain cases, . . . the man who feels himself ruined, for example, on the eve of disgrace; he probably hoped foolishly that the heir with his pocket stuffed with bank-notes would be moved by his condition, would take pity on him, would make him a present, would lend him some money. . . . Men have such fancies, such insane hopes—such superstitions I may call them, at some terrible moments of their lives. . . . Gamblers know that! Every man cleaned out—*décauvé*—be it by speculation or by cards—has such moments of weakness—"

Gabrielle, who was listening with a beating heart, in horrible anguish, was afraid she might be growing deathly pale. She lowered her veil over her face.

That club slang that Gaston suddenly fell into alarmed Gabrielle. The wretched man seemed to her not making a deposition, but a confession. "My God! my God!" she thought, "he is growing intoxicated with his own words. How far will it lead him?"

There had been smiles, even on the bench, at the terms employed by Gaston. But no one was scandalized.

It seemed very natural that a man of fashion, who was not in the habit of appearing before the public, and who was intimidated by the solemnity of a court-room, should use his habitual language. It was not considered disrespectful; on the contrary, it was a sort of proof of his sincerity.

It has been often said that men of great genius are much indebted to neophytes for breaking through the rules that govern them. Majestic, regularly constituted public bodies, judges especially, have a sort of collective wisdom, in the light of which they complaisantly dwell. The court rather enjoyed this erratic way of speaking, these unwonted club reminiscences, and looked on them as vouchers for the witness's sincerity.

The presiding judge, who was celebrated for playing a good game of whist, smiled and nodded his head, as if to agree with him.

Gaston, more excited than ever by this apparent approval, started off again, drawing himself up with renewed self-satisfaction, and sharpening his voice :

"*Monsieur le president*, allow me to describe the scene as I imagine it to have taken place in the Bois de Boulogne : The man may have come up to Pierre Mortier, . . . darkness gives courage . . . he may have asked a favor of him, just a loan at first. He may have been refused roughly. The deceased may have insulted the man who asked help from him, . . . who may have spoken with tears, of his honor, of his wife, of his child—who may have said he was about to kill himself. He may have laughed at his despair. Yes—that laugh may have been enough to turn a man who was desperate into a murderer. As the man laid his hands on him, tried to take him by the arm, he may have pushed him from him. He may have given him one of those blows with his big fists that might have felled an ox—drunkenness had not weakened him. Then, stung by the outrage, by the roughness of the refusal, anger may have been stronger than anything else in the mind of the man who had asked help, he may have seen nothing around him, and, half blind, and in self-defense, he may have struck with one sweep of his arm the man before him with the handle of his cane—"

Gaston stopped short, as if choked by a sudden spasm. A murmur ran through the court-room.

Ah ! if he had but seen Gabrielle, as pale as death, with closed eyes that she dared not open, trying to blind her heart, to keep herself from seeing !

"You forget, *Monsieur de Monterey*," said the presiding judge, "or you may not know, that it has been proved that Pierre Mortier was killed by a steel hammer, and not by a cane."

The judge said this in a repressive way. He was beginning to think that the deposition of this witness was getting tiresome, and that this man of fashion was presuming on the indulgence shown to him.

"True," stammered Gaston, "very true. I did not know . . . that is, I was supposing—"

"Your imagination is getting the better of you. . . . You can go down."

The counsel for Jean Mortier rose immediately.

"I thank *Monsieur de Monterey*," he said, eagerly, "for having thrown light on a matter which has been debated by the surgeons."

who examined the body. It is proved that the wounds, to be so severe, must have been made by some weapon that had a long, flexible handle. A nail can be knocked into a board by a little hammer like the one before us. . . . But, to fracture a skull, I defy the stoutest man—

The spectators laughed at this argument, which impressed them.

"Maitre Lacaille," said the judge, "this is discursive, you must reserve these points for your defense."

"Excuse me, *monsieur le president*, we can not begin a discussion too early, and the testimony of Monsieur de Monterey has an importance concerning which I ask the court's permission to say a few words."

The judge deferred to this polite request.

He leaned back in his great high-backed chair.

Gaston would gladly have done as he had been told, and have sat down, but he felt as if he could not bend his legs; he was afraid he could not walk straight, afraid that he might stagger in going back to his place. He looked at the judge in a way that would have brought suspicion on him if any one had doubted the infallibility of the opinion he had already formed upon the case, or had not been quite persuaded that a stupefying effect might be produced by the grave majesty of the assembly.

Maitre Lacaille had a good deal to say concerning the last words that had fallen from Gaston; he commented upon them, he amplified them, he pointed out that they were the involuntary expression of a logical train of reasoning; he implored the jury to take especial note of them, and sketched out with great skill the points on which the trial must eventually turn.

According to him, it was perfectly evident that, to sustain the charge of a murder committed on a man of Pierre Mortier's physical strength, it must necessarily be conceded and admitted that an adversary so delicate as Jean Mortier must have had some weapon that gave swing enough to strike a murderous blow.

Here the counsel made use of a bit of biblical learning, which had quite an effect upon his audience. David could never have overthrown Goliath by a blow of his fist; he needed the sling and the stone.

Now, could the prosecution bring any proof that the hammer had been attached to such a species of wand?

"Why not?" said the imperial prosecutor, in a parenthesis; "the whole scene passed in a wood."

Maitre Lacaille gave a formidable and contemptuous laugh, not at all respectful toward the imperial official. But a public officer is fair game; any sarcasm directed at him is permissible.

The counsel for the defense continued, and appealed a second time to the very ingenious suppositions of Monsieur de Monterey.

Gaston made a great effort to make a sound that might not rattle in his throat.

"Of course, of course," he said; "I expressed what I felt."

"Therefore you consider, monsieur, that the charge that a murder was committed by a little, short-handled hammer is absurd?"

This speech appeared to rouse the imperial prosecutor; he moved in his chair.

Gaston stammered:

"Yes, it seems to me so; . . . and yet, . . . if the experts, . . . if the magistrates—"

All this had lasted long enough. The presiding judge wanted to put a stop to it.

"Maitre Lacaille," he said, "you are taking advantage of the good feeling of the witness, and his evident desire to give testimony in favor of the prisoner."

Gaston started. The judge thought he had offended him.

"O Monsieur de Monterey," he said, "I am very far from disapproving of your feelings of humanity and all you have said—even the supposititious case, as you have put it, has brought out some points that may be very useful in the inquiry—and are not surprising in a man of your education. You received a most unfavorable impression of the man murdered, and your opinion of the prisoner is in his favor."

"True, *monsieur le president*, I should like to save him."

This was said eagerly.

"So be it; but I must desire the gentlemen of the jury to remember that all you say is not fact, but impressions. You saw nothing of the scene you have described?"

"Nothing."

"Consequently you have no facts to go upon. But the gentlemen of the jury will take into account moral probabilities. They will appreciate. . . . Have you anything more to tell us?"

Gaston was afraid he had not said enough, but yet he murmured :

"Nothing, *monsieur le president*."

And a moment later he added, without knowing how he came to speak :

"I believe . . . I am certain that the prisoner is innocent."

"Yes, you said so before."

"I repeat it, *monsieur le president*. He *is* innocent—he is innocent !"

Gaston's tone, as he repeated this, was that of a man drunk or mad.

The judge renewed his proposition to Monsieur de Monterey to sit down ; and Gaston, satisfied with having been able to relieve his conscience twice by a solemn declaration in favor of Jean Mortier, bowed to the bench, and stiffly, with his features working, but apparently under the influence of the deepest pity, went back to the witnesses' bench.

As he sat down, he caught Emilienne's eyes fixed on him, questioning him with more curiosity than gratitude. Who was this woman looking at him so keenly ? Why did her looks trouble his very soul ? If she were the wife of the prisoner, why didn't she thank him by a smile, instead of almost menacing him by the way she looked at him ? He felt ill at ease as he turned from this unexpected judge.

As to Gabrielle, when Gaston saw her sitting with her head down and her veil over her face, he dreaded to see her lift it. He did not want to catch her eye. He was not at all sure that she would smile upon him for the way in which he had fulfilled the task that they had agreed upon between them.

The other witnesses, summoned by Jean Mortier, told of the debts of the married pair, and of their being paid the moment they had received the two thousand francs.

No one could accuse Jean Mortier of violence or ill-temper. The *curé* owned that he did not often see him at church, but his wife was there regularly, and her husband's toleration for her pious practices proved clearly that he was not a bad man.

As he was not a hardened freethinker, it was the less likely that he was an assassin.

The butcher, their good neighbor, burst into tears in speaking of the family. His great, ruddy face gave a sort of comic effect to



his sympathy, and, though people did not laugh at him, they smiled at what ought to have excited their pity.

He mentioned twice, not to praise himself or to advertise his shop, but as a proof of the pity and esteem he felt for the family, that he had offered them *bouillon*. It seemed to him proof of a certain kind.

The deposition of the medical experts brought up a discussion on the question whether the little steel hammer could have struck with force enough, without more swing than Jean Mortier's arm could give its short handle, to inflict such blows.

Naturally the two experts, who both stood high as men of science, contradicted each other.

The one owned his surprise at the view that had been taken of the case, and demonstrated, by dynamics and the science of projectiles, that the scene, as it had been represented, was impossible.

The other, on the contrary, declared that nothing could have been more easy.

A slight blow on the temple would have been sufficient to stun Pierre Mortier, drunk as he was, and might have brought on sudden congestion, which would have put him at the mercy of a very much weaker man than himself.

Most probably, stunned by the unexpected blow, the victim had fallen backward. In his hair, and at the back of his neck, dirt and grass had been found. The other wounds, which had been fatal, might have been made as he lay helpless, unable to defend himself, for passion tenfold increases the strength of a murderer excited by his deed of blood.

Far from being surprised at the fracture of the skull, this ingenious expert was only amazed that the whole head had not been knocked to pieces!

He cited, *à propos* to his theory, with exquisite art and in select language, frightful examples of the same thing. He affirmed that in crimes of this nature the murderer generally tries to disfigure the victim, especially when the crime has been committed upon impulse, in a sudden frenzy. The alarm of the murderer before the fall of his victim leads him, he asserted, by an instinct of prudence into mad ferocity, so that he would gladly annihilate the corpse that still seems to threaten him.

This fearful ferocity was in itself an indication of the naturally mild disposition of the murderer. A professional homicide, a man

of homicidal character, would have had more command over himself, and would have scorned useless and aggravating mutilation.

What had been said of the prisoner's character, he thought entirely consistent with scientific presumptions. Without wishing to influence the jury, but solely absorbed in the scientific question, the doctor on his soul and conscience thought the murder easy and probable.

Jean, he thought, probably had not intended to strike a fatal blow. Carried away by his own suffering, he had given his first stroke, and then in the passion of despair which followed, he had gone on, the deed seeming irreparable, but his natural good feeling having returned quickly, he had paused with half his work of destruction accomplished, and had rushed away.

The doctor started the idea that counsel might plead the irresponsibility of the prisoner resulting from temporary insanity. As his learning captivated the ladies present, interested the court, and fixed the attention of the jurors, he spoke at some length, and made the most of his illustrations. He cited Papavoine, who, walking in a fit of melancholy in the Bois de Vincennes, had been turned into a murderer by a clap of thunder.

These two very different crimes—each, however, committed in a wood that was dear to Parisians—made a coincidence, or rather an analogy, which was calculated to captivate the imagination. What pendants would not two pictures of these dark deeds have made!

The doctor greatly regretted that he had not Pierre Mortier's skull, to strengthen, by a physiological demonstration, his physiological and philosophical argument; but in default of it he pointed out on his own head where the wounds had been made by the murderer. The first blow had been given on the temple. The mark was faint but clear. This blow had brought on congestion. The second blow had broken the skin; the third had fractured the bone, and the brain had oozed out.

With his fingers, which ran over his head, as if he were playing on a piano, the expert executed a most skillful scientific demonstration.

He was young, and the other doctor was old. Was it not natural that the one who had black hair should know more than the one whose hair was gray? What would be the use of scientific investigations, if the younger generation did not know more than the older

one? Formerly, what men of science learned led them to doubt. Nowadays, certainty is the first condition of knowledge.

Doctors are not called upon to consult over a dead body, to express astonishment at death, but to declare its cause. This young and illustrious doctor was never daunted by a thing's being unlikely; he was stimulated by it, and "reduced" it, as he would have done a sprain or a fracture, to absolute truth.

Jean listened stupefied. He felt utterly overwhelmed.

What! was it not enough that appearances so monstrous should be against him? Must this man, who had no cause for personal spite, who covered over his most cruel affirmations with protestations of kind feeling, crush him in his turn, and make clear to the eyes of others this dark, abominable mystery?

When he was asked if he had anything to say, he had no voice, no eager words at his command, to utter any protestation.

He only sobbed.

"No," he replied, "What can I answer? . . . I am not a man of learning; I know but one thing, and that is that I did not kill Pierre, that I never struck him, and that I am innocent. . . . I swear it, . . . I swear!"

Poor fellow! They believed him, though they did not the less believe in the crime. Was it not possible that his memory had grown confused, that he had forgotten the madness of a few brief moments?

Maitre Lacaille was infinitely careful how he contradicted the young surgeon. He reserved his attack till he should make his speech, when he need fear no answer. He did not wish to force him to bring out any more erudition.

It seemed to him as if the old doctor, in spite of professional jealousy, needed only a little pressing to come over to the opinion of his colleague.

Old men, not liking to be left behind, very often modernize themselves, as it were, at one jump, and yield to fashionable reasoning.

On the other hand, juries, when an affair is obscure, lean greatly upon experts, and in that way quiet their consciences.

These men who, in their own line, know more than the judges, impose even on them. The practiced lawyer did not want the learned doctor to be drawn out any further.

The speech of the imperial prosecutor was severe, but he did

not seem implacable. While he called for a verdict of guilty, he did not seem indisposed to admit extenuating circumstances.

He was a handsome man, a literary man, who was believed to be making visits with a view to his election to a vacant chair in the Academy,\* when he was not in the court-room. He had written a work on "The Folly of loving Money," which pleased the ladies, and had married with great prudence a young lady with a large fortune.

He made in his speech, which he had composed to serve as a new preface to his book in case of its going into a second edition, some touching lamentations over that coveteousness which corrupts the noblest natures, and he pointed to Jean Mortier as an example of how men are led astray by love of money.

As to the facts themselves no doubt seemed possible.

Whether the hammer had had a long handle added to it, or whether Pierre Mortier had been struck by it in the way described by the surgeon who had been called in as an expert, or not, there it was—the authentic, indisputable instrument that had committed the murder, and in the face of the confessions of the prisoner (though he persisted in denying his guilt), there was no possibility of establishing an *alibi*.

When the counsel for the defense arose, there was a sigh of satisfaction from everybody.

The pathetic part of the drama was going to begin.

Maitre Lacaille was superb, as he always was. He drew tears by his picture of the home of the good upholsterer. As to the explanation of the murder, he would oppose the opinion of Doctor *Tant mieux* to the pedantic demonstrations of Doctor *Tant pis*. He touched with persuasive subtilty on all the changes, all the probabilities alleged by the prosecution, and, after two hours' earnest struggle with the ghost of the accusation, he suddenly came to an unexpected conclusion. Veiling his purpose under a cloud of phrases, he made an appeal to the mercy of the jury. He implored the jurors to be humane and generous, and, if they doubted, to give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt.

It was difficult for those who heard him not to believe that he

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\* In France, a candidate for any vacancy in the French Academy, the highest honor attainable by a literary man, is expected to call in person and solicit the vote of each of the remaining thirty-nine members.—TRANSLATOR.

himself doubted his client's innocence. They could see that he had conscientiously fulfilled his task of advocate, though he would not risk his professional honor by affirming that the man whom he defended was innocent.

I have already said that some lawyers, high in their profession, dread above all things to be thought to be their clients' dupes. They are like some actors who, all through their parts, seem to want the public to understand that they are playing a *role*, and are not the real personage.

Jean and his wife had listened with equal attention.

At certain moments, when the rhetoric of the lawyer pressed closely on the arguments of the prosecution, and seemed to overthrow them, they had exchanged a look, or rather their looks melted together, as it were, and something shone in their eyes like a smile.

But when, toward the close, Maitre Lacaille seemed to be laying out his lines to gain all he could, if he could not gain acquittal, the two poor creatures gazed at one another in terror.

Emilienne looked round the court-room, which seemed to tremble and rock beneath her feet, to find something that might save her on the edge of the abyss. She fixed her eyes desperately on the crucifix that was placed over the chair of the presiding judge, and implored the Saviour in his mercy to set aside the verdict that these unanimous appeals to mercy seemed now to make sure.

Gabrielle had raised her veil and lifted her head during the lawyer's speech. She, too, grew very pale when she seized the meaning of the concession that Maitre Lacaille was making, and, by a gesture that she could not have restrained, she clasped her hands and raised them in mute prayer, trying with a feeling of touching union, or else of sudden fear, to be seen by Emilienne, and to seem to say to her:

"Bear me witness before God that it is not my fault, if they find him guilty. I am praying for him, like you. I dread the verdict even as you do!"

But Emilienne saw nothing but that divine Saviour, who had been unjustly condemned to death.

The judge, before he began to sum up, asked the prisoner if he had anything to say.

Jean rose, straightened himself, and, in a strange voice, unlike the tones in which he had spoken before, said:

"Yes, *monsieur le president*, I have something to say, and that is that I wish to have nothing to do with extenuating circumstances. I had rather die at once than to be sent to the galleys. I implore you, gentlemen of the jury, . . . put me to death if you do not think me worthy to be the husband of my wife, the father of my child!"

A sob exhausted his courage. He fell back on his bench, and tears streamed from his eyes.

The judge's summing up was considered by all the papers of the day a model of impartiality.

But the impartiality of such documents makes them the more dreadful in certain cases. By reproducing with the like fidelity the arguments of the prosecution and those of the defense, and by placing them magisterially in either scale, the judge complicated things apparently for the jury, and extinguished any remains of favor that might have remained in their minds from the oratorical electricity of the defense.

The jury took a long time to deliberate.

It seldom takes long to agree upon a verdict of acquittal.

And, therefore, while the court was waiting for the verdict, the talk in the court-room grew unfavorable to the prisoner.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, people began not only to believe that he would be condemned to hard labor for life, but they passed beyond the galleys, and talked of the guillotine.

On this subject, which excited a delicious terror in some imaginations, conversation became animated. The chances of pardon were calculated; the delay that must elapse before the execution. And some people, who frequented the early morning exhibitions on the Place de la Roquette, gave graphic details of former executions.

Emilienne listened to it all. Her ears caught the dreadful words. People near her lowered their voices a little, but she heard them through the hum; and the pale Christ over the seat of judgment, smitten afresh by the dreadful talk around Him, seemed to her to sweat drops of blood in His oaken frame.

She had remained leaning on the balustrade, her elbows resting on the wood, silent, motionless, savage, and embittered, thinking how she could visit her anger on all mankind, and on the law itself, if the blow she apprehended should fall on her innocent husband.

The platform, now quitted by the judges, left full in her view

Madame de Monterey; and now the two wives looked at each other.

Gabrielle knew nothing of what was being said around Emilienne, but she observed upon her face the reflection of each horrible word. She saw her petrified by a horror that froze all her limbs, and she herself quivered with anxiety.

Gaston, nailed as it were upon his seat, for he had not dared to leave the court-room, was biting his nails furiously. He looked every minute or two at his watch, or cast suspicious glances to right and left of him, as if he were afraid that somebody would feel astonished at his keeping his seat, now that he had no more part in the trial, but carefully avoiding looking straight before him in the direction of the platform. A judge sat there for him, and him alone, and that judge was Gabrielle.

He thought the court-room suffocating. Drops stood upon his forehead. He did not wipe them off; so that he might have been said to weep at every pore.

At the end of three quarters of an hour, the ringing of a bell made everybody start. Gaston folded his arms, Gabrielle clasped her hands tighter, and Emilienne clutched more firmly the balustrade.

The jurors came back.

They did not look so very terrible. None of them were pale. That, at least, was a good sign.

The foreman of the jury held with dignity before his breast a large sheet of paper, on which the verdict was written. If the paper had been bloodstained, surely so good a man (a worker in bronze he was in the Marais) could not have pressed it, as he was doing, to his heart.

The judges came in.

All these details, which I have not invented, and which form part of the every-day proceedings in a law-court, seem to me indispensable to the atmosphere of the drama.

There was a deep silence—a silence as if everything held its breath, and the presiding judge requested the foreman of the jury to read the verdict.

Jean, who had been brought in at the same time as the judges entered, stood up, with his eyes fixed on his wife, and pale as death.

The foreman of the jury placed his hand upon his heart, which seemed to have an escutcheon or placard over it, for the pocket-

book in his pocket made a square outline on the left side of his coat, and, in an official voice, he read :

"On my honor and my conscience, before God and before men, the verdict of the jury is—

"Yes; the majority decides that the prisoner is guilty!"

As a murmur rose, the artisan in bronze, who was not of bronze himself, hastened to add :

"The majority of us consider that there are extenuating circumstances in favor of the prisoner."

Jean fell back in his seat, utterly overcome.

Emilienne had been about to utter a cry, but she restrained herself with all her strength. What was the use of giving those spectators, who had come there to look on grief, the pleasure of seeing her despair?

She wanted all her courage now more than ever. All was not over yet. She would soon know how far human iniquity could carry the injustice of men.

Many sighs had been uttered in that court-room. Nervous people forgot the minor interests of the drama in the *dénouement*, and were very glad that it was not to have a bloody termination.

Maître Lacaille received the verdict with some compunction, but he gave several of his colleagues a look that said plainly, "I expected it."

The imperial prosecutor demanded sentence. The presiding judge then asked the prisoner's counsel if he had anything more to say.

"I recommend Jean Mortier to the indulgence of the court," said the lawyer, gathering up his papers, and in the commonplace tone in which a priest, accustomed to death-beds, says a requiem over a dead body as he is about to go away.

The judges had no need to retire to their chamber to consult together. They rose, drew somewhat apart, and talked in whispers. The chief judge, like the officiating priest when he says the confession in the beginning of the mass, bowed right and left to those around him, and they, like the lesser clergy in the service, bent toward him and bowed to him.

After that Jean Mortier's affair was ended.

The judge went back to his place, put on his cap (the cap adds to his infallibility), and, after reading the articles of the code suffi-



ciently abridged for the purpose, gave sentence, condemning Jean Mortier to fifteen years' hard labor at the galleys.

This was not a severe sentence for so great a crime.

"Prisoner, you have three days left to make your appeal for a new trial to the *cour de cassation*," said the chief judge, mildly.

Jean remained standing, not stupefied, but thunderstruck, and trying to care nothing for the thunderbolt. He remembered the words of the verdict; it had hit him like an arrow in his face, and imitating, unconsciously, the formula of the foreman of the jury, he laid his hand upon his heart and said loudly:

"On my honor and my conscience, before God and before men, I swear that I am innocent. I refuse any extenuating circumstances, I refuse to appeal, I refuse the galleys. I commit my cause to God who will judge you all, and will some day make manifest the real murderer, when it is too late."

Some newspapers blamed this speech, saying it was too theatrical not to be the utterance of a hypocrite.

Jean turned toward his wife.

"Farewell, *my* Emilienne!"

That possessive pronoun uttered at the moment when wife and child and property and all things else ceased to be his, appeared also a bravado.

Jean quickly left the court-room, dragged out by the gendarmes, not hearing or not listening to his wife, who cried after him:

"*Au revoir ! au revoir !*"

The crowd heard her, and were differently impressed by this supreme protest.

People stood aside to let Emilienne pass. She had come there alone, and alone she went away. All her limbs trembled, but she did not faint, and without supporting herself by the wall she went down the staircase of the *cour d'assises*, and hastened with a quick step toward the *conciergerie*.

She alone had understood the scene; she alone had understood Jean's wild despair.

She was no longer afraid of men's injustice, she dreaded her husband's agony when she heard his appeal to God.

Madame de Monterey trembled as much as did Madame Mortier; but she concealed it by bowing to the ladies who had sat on each side of her, and who rose to go at the same time. Her face seemed

only to express compassion, but in her heart there was an indescribable dread.

In vain had she reassured herself by reasons of all kinds, by ever so many infallible proofs. In vain she had just heard the veritable authentic murderer tried and sentenced by the verdict of twelve jurors, approved by four judges, and believed to be guilty by a surgeon of great authority. In vain her conjugal and maternal instincts said to her:

"Why are you afraid? What the court has decreed can not be undone. The inquiry, the labors of the *juge d'instruction*, and the trial are all over. There will never be any reopening of this melancholy affair."

Something fatal—was it superstition or a voice divine?—whispered in her heart:

"It will be reopened. It is not yet done with. Gaston is not acquitted. It is he who will have to endure fifteen years at the galleys!"

It was absurd, but it was a madness that would not pass away.

Monsieur and Madame de Monterey returned home separately.

When they next saw each other, an embarrassment that they tried to put aside, but which paralyzed all attempts at intercourse, held them aloof from each other.

Neither liked to be the first to speak of the trial. However, in the end it was Gabrielle who began by pitying Jean Mortier. Gaston, encouraged, owned that he had trembled lest the sentence should have been more severe. He thought the upholsterer would do well not to ask for a new trial.

Then suddenly, by a sort of tacit understanding, husband and wife gave up this subject of conversation. There was a long silence.

"Can not we leave now?" asked Gaston, a quarter of an hour later.

"I was thinking of it," replied Gabrielle.

"Well, why not go to-morrow?"

"To-morrow if you like! We are ready."

"Then I will go and say good-by at the club to everybody."

And so it was that that evening after dinner Gaston went out, and did not come home till very late in the night, about the same time that he used to come home before his reformation.

Gabrielle was lying awake, but she was not watching for him. Shut up in her own room, borne down by a burden she dared not examine too closely, she had passed all the evening and part of the night in tears.

Gaston, on the other hand, had been very gay at the club—too gay; he had boasted of his deposition in the court-room, and after midnight, though he had not touched a card, worn out by his own talkativeness which had given him a great appetite, he had gone to supper with his friends as in the good old times of his games of *baccarat*.

He was completely drunk when he came home, which was why he slept profoundly, so that Gabrielle, who heard him snoring through the door, was able to comfort herself by thinking if she pleased that he slept the sleep of the innocent.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### ANOTHER VERDICT.

MONSIEUR and Madame de Monterey had been settled three weeks in the Hôtel de la Métropole, at Geneva, and every day they talked of continuing their journey. But after their one great effort of quitting France to get rid of the anxieties that agitated them both, they seemed to have taken a disgust to the project of a life of  
• excursions and perpetual ascensions.

They dreaded to own, even to themselves, that they still needed something to occupy their minds and to draw away their thoughts from dwelling upon one subject.

To seek a cure is to acknowledge an evil, and every day Gaston would say to Gabrielle:

“We are very comfortable here—let us stay.”

But, in reality, both suffered greatly in Geneva.

Gabrielle took long walks with Roger, and went out boating on the lake. The child was amused by that which only lulled the sorrows of his mother.

Monsieur de Monterey never walked beyond the town, but he was forever walking within its limits—forever on foot, with no object apparently in view.

A day very seldom passed without his meeting somebody he knew from Paris, who was sauntering as if upon the boulevards. These meetings gave him an excuse for luncheons or for dinners. Then the travelers went on their way, and Gaston, who dared not be left to his own thoughts, would stroll about the quays, smoking his cigar, watching for the arrival of fresh Parisians, making the most of any acquaintance, however slight, that had its origin in Paris, and turning it into a sudden intimacy of twenty-four or forty-eight hours' duration, which began when they met and ended when they said good-by to each other.

Though he was affable to excess with these intimates, and very careful in his behavior toward his wife and even toward his little boy, as if he had been afraid that, should he offend them, he might rouse some suspicion of a restlessness he could not explain, he was capricious, proud, and insolent toward the servants at the hotel and the general public.

He had two quarrels, one after the other, succeeding breakfasts where too much wine had been drunk: one at the Hôtel des Bergues with a member of his own club, who had not cared, in foreign parts, to be treated as an intimate by a man with whom his intercourse in Paris had been one of mere formal politeness, and who received too coldly, as Gaston fancied, a hearty thump upon the back; the other was on the quay, with a man who was passing, a Genevese, who had thrown away his cigar just at the moment when Gaston was about to ask him for a light.

The first quarrel came near ending in a duel; but the men Gaston asked to be his seconds, who had sat near him at the *table-d'hôte*, put him off by declaring that his extreme sensitiveness and the sharpness of his replies were due to a bottle of Rhenish wine, drunk, for a bet, after a more than sufficient quantity of champagne.

Gaston, who had grown savage at the idea of going out to fight a duel, and who, for a whole day, had been making and remaking a vow to kill his antagonist, was pleased, upon the whole, not to be tempted to commit a murder.

The second affair was more simple and even more ridiculous.

Gaston had tried to break his cane over the man with whom he picked a quarrel on the quay, who, however, had seized the cane by a quick movement, snapped it in two, and flung the pieces into the lake; then, bowing stiffly to Monsieur de Monterey, he said to him:

'If you would like another cane, . . . I sell them. My address

is à la Canne de Jean Jacques, Rue du Mont Blanc, where I am at your service."

The boatmen and the strollers on the quay had witnessed this scene, which had greatly amused them. Gaston, out of countenance, dared not run after the man who sold canes and strike him with his fists. He stood looking into the distance, where, in the blue, transparent lake floated his broken stick, and remembered, involuntarily, the one that he had himself thrown into the fire at home. He stood, pale and trembling with shame, anger, and vexation.

"Monsieur le comte," said a young democrat of the Swiss Confederation, "I'll go after it for half a franc, if you like."

Gaston, roused by this offer, made a gesture of disdain, and, with his hands in his pockets, walked back to his hotel in a fury.

It so happened that that very morning Gabrielle had remarked him switching the air with his light cane as he set out for his walk.

She met him, when he came back, with the same question she had put to him in Paris :

"What have you done with your cane?"

"Lost it."

He did not dare to say, as he had said before, that he had forgotten it.

"Lost it?—oh, how?"

"It fell into the lake."

"Ah!"

The answer seemed singular and the fact a mystery. Gabrielle, in her turn, thought of the old ordeals by fire and water. She was assailed by a presentiment which the discovery of the real story of this cane, which she heard some people discussing at the *table-d'hôte*, did not remove. The poor woman fancied it an omen.

She had remarked that Gaston was very pale and had a little foam at the corners of his mouth. She went out, as soon as she could, and took a longer walk than usual with Roger.

One morning Gaston rode out early on horseback to visit Voltaire's country-seat at Ferney.

Perhaps he felt himself in a philosophic humor. The house of the great master of mockery might give him a lesson. At Geneva every one talked incessantly of Jean Jacques, and Rousseau, the patron of insolent venders of walking-sticks, was not at all to Mon-

sieur de Monterey's fancy. Voltaire's brilliant wit, always caustic and gay, seemed to him a strengthening antidote.

Gabrielle did not make many inquiries as to the rides and walks of her husband; only, when he did not tell her he would be absent, she always waited for him before going to luncheon. She was uneasy at his taking his meals without her; and she felt no appetite when she was afraid he had accepted an invitation elsewhere. She stood before the great door of the hotel, with her son at her side, looking out over the lake, not that she fancied she saw Gaston in one of those boats that every minute were coming up and being moored beside the quay, but she was gazing into the distance, with a vague feeling that she needed the soothing influences of the scene around. The blue water was like a sort of sky, brought down within reach of her eyes, which were weary of looking up into the blue of heaven.

She had been there about half an hour, when the postman, who was going his rounds, and who wanted to pass into the hotel, brushed so near her that she had to move a little to avoid him. "Is there any letter for me?" she asked, without much curiosity, for she really expected no news from France, Monsieur Henrion having written to her a few days before.

"What name, if you please?" answered the postman.

Gabrielle gave her name.

The man looked through his bundle, made up beforehand for the guests at the Métropole.

"Here is something for Monsieur de Monterey."

"Give it me."

The postman did not like to refuse to give a wife what was directed to her husband. And Gabrielle really had no great feeling of curiosity. She took the envelope held out to her. It was a very large one, covered with post-marks and addresses, and it seemed a good deal dilapidated by its long journey. The outside of the letter looked strange to Madame de Monterey. She tried to make out the post-marks, and started when she suddenly perceived distinctly the postage-mark of Pondicherry.

It was a letter from Monsieur Henri des Arbois—a letter all the way from India!

What was there surprising in the fact that a traveler, who had started for the land of the Golden Fleece, should write to an old associate? Probably the envelope contained only news of his voyage, descriptions of the countries he had passed through, or had spent a

few days in ; information concerning his inheritance ; or may be commissions of more than one kind, given by this man who had led a fast Parisian life, and was now exiled to the land of the *bayadères*, to a friend whom he believed to be in Paris still.

Never had Madame de Monterey been curious to read letters directed to her husband. And this one, written by an old associate at the gaming-table, an accomplice in all his follies, might contain details, confidences, and reminiscences of a kind that might wound her modesty, and convict her of indiscretion.

Therefore, her first impulse was, with some disdain to slip the letter into the pocket of her dress ; but she did not take her hand off of it, and in her pocket she went on crumpling it and feeling it.

There was a sort of electricity emanating from the paper which seemed to affect her fingers and impel her to draw them from their hiding-place. But when she took them from her pocket they still held the letter, and Madame de Monterey began again to read over the address, questioning it, as it were, as if the writing could have told her what secrets lay under the seal.

This Henri des Arbois, if he had stayed in France, might, just as likely as Gaston de Monterey—perhaps more so—have been called as one of the witnesses on the trial. Had he not been one of the guests at supper on that fatal night ?

Perhaps at Pondicherry he had read the newspaper account of the affair ; perhaps he might say what he thought of the verdict, or something about his friend Gaston's testimony. Perhaps he had told his correspondent what he himself could have testified ; perhaps he might doubt the poor upholsterer's guilt, and give good reasons for it which would throw light into her agitated heart—poor woman !

"I will make Gaston let me read it," she thought to herself.

But Gaston, no doubt, had remained absorbed at Ferney before the portraits of Voltaire's chimney-sweep and washer-woman. The hour of luncheon had passed some time before.

"I am hungry," said Roger.

Gabrielle took her boy into the dining-room of the hotel, and seated him at table under charge of his governess, who would not sit down without her pupil ; and then, stung by irritating curiosity, by a sudden savage hunger after certainty, she went up to her own rooms, rushed into her bedchamber, locked herself in, and tore open the envelope.

Alas for Gaston at that moment ! Why had he not come back ? He deserved this infringement of his rights. Besides, Gabrielle was not conscious of any precise reasoning. She wanted to know.

The first thing Gabrielle saw in the envelope were two bank-notes for one thousand francs each, stuck into a letter that looked long !

What was the meaning of this ? Before she read the letter, Madame de Monterey turned the notes over and over. It seemed to her she recognized them ; that they had something more than an ordinary likeness and uniformity with certain bank-notes she had committed to the flames.

What purchase did Monsieur des Arbois want his friend to make, or what debt did he want paid ? Why he had not sent him a check upon his banker ? Why did he run the risk, without taking apparently any particular precaution, of sending two thousand franc-notes in a letter on so long a journey, during which they might well have been lost or stolen ?

Gabrielle would gladly have had the notes disclose to her what was in the letter, and make it needless she should read it. But the more she looked at them, the more she examined them, the more they seemed to make to her a mute appeal. The blue of the engraving on the notes was as blue as those mysterious waters that she had been looking at a few minutes before.

She felt impelled to read the letter ; she had to push her indiscretion, or her curiosity to the very end.

If the letter were innocent, Gabrielle would make the most heart-felt apologies to her husband. If the letter told the young wife scandalous secrets, she would excuse herself to her own conscience by her desire to do right, and so heal the outrage to her modesty. But she must read it. She *would* read it, and she read.

"My dear friend," wrote Henri des Arbois, "are you still down on your luck ? If so, I send you a lucky penny.

"No ! it is not, as you may think, a little crumb—a chip from my inheritance. Up to this time the inheritance has been unavailable—in the lump. It is like a block of diamonds : I shall have to chip away at it for some time before I can carry it off in my pocket. What I send you is but a restitution. Did you want to put my honesty to the test ; or were you trying, like the steward in the Bible story, to slip your cup into my sack, that you might have the satisfaction of having me brought back to the club by the rural police ?



"When I left Paris, France, and Europe, with letters of credit on the bankers I was likely to come across during my journey, I flung into a traveling-bag, without opening it, the charming envelope in which your modesty had placed those fifteen thousand francs I had so boldly won, and that you paid so promptly.

"I assure you, *mon cher*, I never dreamed of counting them, after you. I was wrong, and my politeness came very near making me appear a thief.

"Soon after I landed, while arranging my papers of all colors and kinds, I found yours. I had been vowing, during the voyage, by the eternally venerable memory of my uncle, the nabob, that henceforward I was going to be a man of business, an irreproachable financier. I felt it due to the millions that had come into my hands. I walk about with my eyes down, trying to pick up all the pins I find, and sticking them into the sleeves of my coat, especially as a pin in these parts is more than probably surmounted by a diamond.

"So it happened that my first cash operation has proved to me, mathematically, what I was always sure of theoretically, viz., that you are a careless, reckless prodigal. Instead of the fifteen thousand francs I had been reproaching myself with having won of you, I found seventeen thousand in your envelope.

"I send you back the overplus at once; I feel a sort of horror of this money. If I were to keep it a week I might use it in speculation, and I should feel obliged to pay you interest on it if I won. I send the same notes back that I received, out of respect to the truth, and the superstitions of the gaming-table.

"I dare say it is very imprudent; but I thought I had better take the risk, some kinds of risks being favorable to gamblers. It is the very last risk I will ever have anything to do with.

"If these two notes should reach you, accept them as infallible talismans: stake them, but be very careful not to lose them. Two thousand francs—*retour de la l'Inde*, as they put on wine-bottles—what claret can be compared to them, to put a gambler on his mettle? These two notes will bring you more luck than two thousand francs' worth of the rope that has hanged a criminal.

"I don't know but that, on the whole, you had better have them framed, like a religious picture, or an *ex-voto*, and not taint them at the club, for I suspect they had a pious origin; it may have chanced that Madame de Monterey, seeing you come home looking so forlorn,

*broached to*, as sailors say, after that stormy night we all passed at the club and the *cabaret*, may have tried to buy your soul back from perdition by putting her hand into the cash-box, where she keeps money for charity.

"I have guessed right—have I not?"

"The story you told me about winning largely in some low place, between two and six o'clock in the morning, was a little fib, made up to save your conjugal reputation. . . . When you first told it me, I did not believe it, and now I believe it less than ever.

"In what club or gambling-hell would they have let you at that hour cut in at *baccarat*? If you had had any money, of course they would have been glad to have you for the chance of getting it; but to draw aside and let a fellow in who was cleaned out—*décavé*—and wanted to recover his luck—

"You were too eager to tell me this story, which I did not ask for, and which you told very incoherently. It had a perceptible flavor of being untrue. The bravado of a gamester was put on to hide the submission of a husband. You had begged your wife's pardon, as I recommended you to do—and you did the best thing. She gave you money without counting it, you took it without looking at it, I received it thinking it was all right; and so, for several months, I have been guilty, without intending it, of withholding this money from Madame de Monterey's poor.

"Ah! my poor friend, you were too irritable, too feverish, too savage that night to have been able to recover your self-possession and play a winning game. Didn't I think for one moment you were going to cut my throat with a dessert-knife? And, unless you waylaid and robbed that clown, who was gobbling away at the next table, and who probably went off with the young ladies, I can not imagine how you could have made such a raise, after being cleaned out so entirely.

"*A propos*, I wonder what became of that brute-beast, with his snout in the truffles, flourishing that impudent pocket-book before our very eyes?"

"I will not bore you by any account of my voyage. As to the *bayadères*, if you want my opinion of them—"

Here Gabrielle paused. It had been all she could do to get thus far in the letter. A shudder and a cold chill ran over her, and a rush of blood to her head made her nearly crazy.

The truth—the truth as she had half seen it, half touched it,

denied it, shunned it, fled from it—now wildly seized her in its grasp, it had pulled off its mask. It was never again to be denied or hid!

How could she have believed that ridiculous story that Gaston had been winning in some gambling-house? Monsieur des Arbois, who knew all about such things, had not, like her, been the dupe of such a fiction.

It was clear to her now. Gaston could never have had sufficient command over himself that night to play cards with any chance of winning. His fellow-gambler, his second, his accomplice, had not been deceived; he had detected those miserable falsehoods, he had gone so far as to say "Unless Gaston has robbed that countryman—"

Gabrielle rose up from the arm-chair into which she had dropped, and looked at the bank-notes with horror.

"Ah! if you could but speak!" she cried.

And why should they not speak? She would put them on trial.

She had kept the list of the numbers put down by the notary.

Suppose two of them were engraved on these two bits of paper?

But even if they were not, it was no proof; the numbers written down might be on some of those notes that had remained at Pondicherry. And Gaston's very mistake was of itself witness against him. Would any gambler, especially one rather covetous of gain, just after a great loss, and in presence of a debt of honor, not have known the exact amount of the sum he had won, and would he have committed this blunder without finding it out?

No. Gaston, in his madness after committing his crime, had been in haste to get rid of the stolen notes, taken from the dead man's body, and he had given them away by the handful without carefully counting them.

That was it! that was it! All was now explained.

Gabrielle tossed over her drawers and pulled out the little memorandum-book in which she had written down the numbers, and when she opened it she made no prayer to God that she might not find what she sought. She suffered so much, she had so ungovernable, so agonizing a need, to know the truth, and the whole truth, that she hoped, on the contrary, to find what she was looking for.

And she did find it. One of the notes returned had one of the numbers put down by Maître Boisselot.

Gabrielle felt the floor rock under her feet, and, abandoning herself to her weakness, like a wretch falling over the edge of an abyss, she fell back, thunder-smitten, and fainted away.

Her fainting-fit lasted a quarter of an hour.

Her soul, which did not take flight while her body lay like death, did, in spite of weakness, persist still in watching over, in taking thought for, in resolving to save Gaston.

All that is certain is that Gabrielle, on coming back to life, came at that same moment back to her sorrow.

When she went into her chamber, she had taken the precaution to bolt the doors. She was alone—free to think—free to decide; and she did decide.

What would she do?

First of all, her conscience was on one point at rest. There was on more debate possible, no more subterfuges. Gaston was a robber and a murderer!

She recalled the hideous picture that her husband had presented before the court, and instinctively she clasped her hands and asked God's pardon for him, as she saw the awful vision.

Gaston had been a murderer twice over. He had let another man be sentenced in his stead. His apparent generosity at the trial was only one phase of his meanness. That crime, at least, must be repaired, if it were reparable.

Jean had been sent off to the galleys—unless, indeed, he had signed his appeal, and the court were still keeping his fate in suspense.

The first thing to be done was to interpose between the final decree of the *cour de cassation*, and the man who had been convicted in the *cour d'assises*.

I say to the honor of Gabrielle, or rather not to praise her, which would be superfluous, but that we may see in it another proof of her loyal and heroic character, that the feeling that she must save the man who was innocent, if it were yet possible, was as strong within her heart as her conviction—her clear, horrible conviction—of the guilt of her husband.

Yes, she must save him—that poor man—so noble under the weight of injustice. That was her most imperious, her most pressing duty.

And, to save him, must she give up Gaston?

She had the courage to ask herself this question.

Could she, ought she to dishonor publicly Roger's father? She never thought of herself or of the honor of her name, nor of the sufferings to which she devoted herself! She accepted public disgrace as an expiation. She would go and live near Gaston—near him at the galleys—and she would help his weak nature to bear its punishment. She would take her share of it, since all this might not have happened had she watched over him as she ought to have done.

But must Roger be the victim of her deed of reparation? In order to save one human being, who was innocent, must she sacrifice another? And that other—

Fear joined itself to this doubt.

Without knowing, without inquiring whether she still loved the man whose infamy she had detected, Gabrielle said to herself that a jury would show no pity in his case; there would be no extenuating circumstances. The scaffold, brutal and bloody, would be Gaston's doom!

Was it for her to drag her husband to the guillotine? Must she become a murderess to avenge a murder?

All these ideas passed confusedly through her mind. They swarmed and fluttered in her brain. They came in like a flood, they overthrew everything, they probed her soul to the quick, they obliged her to provide for all emergencies, to improvise all kinds of resolutions, at once.

First of all, she must put the bank-note, that proved everything, in safety. To let it be destroyed would be the height of meanness. If she did, she would be making herself an accomplice in the crime. She must hide the knowledge of the Indian letter from Gaston. Would any one be likely to inform him that the postman had delivered such a letter? Roger, she thought, had paid no attention to it, and its arrival was not known to the servants at the hotel.

Her purpose of obtaining from Monsieur de Monterey a confession, of humbling him under the light that had come from afar, and of bringing him to true repentance, must be deferred. At the first shock, he might be capable of any act of violence or madness, if fear came to him before repentance.

Gabrielle wished to be free to find out some way of acting efficaciously before entering on the dreadful subject with her husband.

Poor fellow! poor fellow! How could she ever show him this proof? How could she tell him that she knew his crime—knew all his baseness and his falsehoods?

She would think about that. But they must leave at once and go back to Paris. There she could get advice from Monsieur Henrion. He was a true friend, one to whom she could tell everything—a confessor.

But why not seek out a real confessor? Why not go to a priest—to him whom she had already employed and commissioned to visit Madame Jean Mortier?

The secrecy of confession is a guarantee of concealment. She had heard of priests who had made men make anonymous restitutions. A priest might carry to the counsel, to the judges, the notes from India. He might say that a tortured conscience had given them into his hands, and that the man condemned and sentenced was innocent.

He might *say* it—but, would they believe him? Could the law be satisfied with such a message? Would what she knew to be a proof, be proof to the judges? Jean Mortier, had he been guilty, might have paid away or flung away these notes at random. Unless she gave up the real murderer, she felt that it would be impossible to convince the judges.

In vain Gabrielle struggled to get out of the circle that hemmed her in. She could not find an outlet. She must choose between the truth which would lead to her husband's disgrace and possibly to his death and latent complicity.

Was her duty so imperative as it appeared to be? Could there be no way in which she might drink the cup in secret—she—and she alone—making it the one object of her life, and dying of it in the end without destroying her husband and her son?

After looking into her conscience and her sense of justice, Gabrielle bethought her of her love. The fight that was to be fought out must be a struggle between all possible feelings. No one aggravating circumstance must be wanting.

Did she love, could she still love a man who had degraded himself at her side, under her own eye, under the outflow of her tenderness?

Madame de Monterey had never acknowledged up to that moment that a heart may give up an affection that bruises and wounds

it. Love is a faith that unworthiness may offend, but never can destroy.

At least, so she had often said to herself in bitter moments of her married life. The time had now come when the question had presented itself for immediate, necessary decision. Could any feeling but that of resignation enable her to bear the burden of the marriage tie without esteem and confidence?

She remembered her early promise, she recalled her young illusions, she thought of that love born of the sisterly relation, and the maternal tie that bound her to Gaston. She remembered the vow she had made to old Monsieur de Monterey. Had she not sworn to watch over him, and to take upon herself the responsibility of his honor and his happiness?

Was it not her fault that his honor was now sullied, and his happiness lost? Had *she* been faithful to her task? When she became a mother, had she not sacrificed her husband to her son?—or, rather her grown-up infant to her nursing one? If she had done better, she might have kept Gaston at home; she might have inspired him with the love, the worship, the habits, the customs of home. She should never have let him expose himself to temptation, to the excitements of clubs, gambling-tables, and the society of reckless men of fashion.

Like mothers by the couch of a sick child who blame themselves for their child's illness, she thought that the incurable malady of Gaston was her fault. She kept saying to herself:

"Am I not to blame for his becoming a criminal? Should I not be more just if I punished myself only, and let him go unbetrayed?"

And this pity which spoke thus in her was love; yes, esteem has nothing to do with it. A mother loves her son though he is guilty. A woman can not root out from her heart the attachment that arises from her sense of a man's need of protection. Yes; she loved him still, and she would always love him. She owed it to herself to love him more, since it was now her mission to redeem him. What a work lay before her if she would extricate him and herself from the abyss in which they were now involved!

But she must not begin by giving him up; that would be pushing him deeper in.

Gabrielle knew that she had good courage, but she also felt that

she must have infinite prudence. The difficulty of knowing when and how to act first added to her scruples.

If she must undertake to expiate or to repair the crime, where should she begin?

She was thinking thus, when somebody knocked at her door, after vainly trying to open it.

It was Gaston.

"Don't you want any luncheon?" he asked, gayly.

Gabrielle shuddered, and then came a sort of savage instinct of compassion. She had an impulse to get up, rush to the door, draw Gaston into her chamber, fling, as it were, his crimes into his face, bow him to the earth, humiliate him, bind him over to repentance.

She wiped away her tears, passed her hand over her forehead, and, as she walked slowly toward the door with tottering steps, she smoothed her dress, put the letter and the two bank-notes deeper down into her pocket, and then, when she was close to the door, she answered him.

"Are you sick?" asked Gaston, surprised by a trembling in his wife's voice.

"I have not been very well," responded Gabrielle, with a sad smile, . . . "but I am better."

"Open the door to me. Open the door!"

She opened it. Seldom had Monsieur de Monterey been in such high spirits. He had come home in full health from his ride. He drew Gabrielle close to him. He looked full in her eyes, as he seldom dared to do, and questioned her without her questioning him.

"True, you are pale! . . . We had better send for a doctor. . . . Geneva has a horrid climate; . . . I was told so before we came. We can leave it to-morrow. I can't let you be ill—do you hear? What would become of me if I were anxious about you?"

There was genuine, tender solicitude in these commonplace words and this selfish expression of interest. Men always adore the judge who never judges them; and, in a confused way, Gaston was conscious that Gabrielle never would deal severely with him.

Madame de Monterey bowed her head and took her husband's arm, though she kept firm hold of the two bank-notes, with which she could have struck him as with a thunderbolt, and went down with him into the dining-room.

The amiable attentions and the gallantry of Gaston were continued. He told her all about his visit to the Château de Ferney,



made fun of what he had seen there, and laughed at the impressions of other tourists more *blasé* than himself.

He said he was now sorry he had been so long making himself acquainted with the environs of Geneva. He meant to do better, and, through all his chatter, he stopped several times to make inquiries about Gabrielle's health.

"He must be out of his senses; he could not be wicked enough not to feel remorse," thought his poor wife, in her secret soul. "How can he be sure that he has escaped all danger even in this world?"

Roger, who usually had very little direct conversation with his father, that morning made him a smart reply, and the laughter of child and father mingled in one peal, while Madame de Monterey said, in her heart:

"The innocence of Roger may surely be set against his father's unconsciousness of guilt. Since the father has no remorse, why should I do what will bring remorse, some day, upon the son?"

And, as she left the dining-room, she made up her mind to put her perplexities into the hand of Providence, and to trust to God to point out some way in which justice might be drawn from the cruel injustice of men. Heaven will help the right easier than men can help Heaven.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ANOTHER COURT OF APPEAL.

GABRIELLE'S hesitation how to begin to act was based, at bottom, more on the difficulty of choosing how she should begin her work of expiation than any pleadings of motherly or wifely feelings.

In all the prayers she offered up during the remainder of that unhappy day, she cried:

"O God! I ask but one thing: show me the way in which I should walk, and I will follow it to the end!"

She was answered more speedily than she could have expected.

That afternoon, as she was restlessly going and coming, bearing about her misery through the hotel corridors, having sent Roger out to walk with his governess, and having let her husband go out without a word—not being able to settle to any employment, for books

and worsted-work would have been horrible in this frame of mind, she walked into the reading-room of the *Métropole*, sat mechanically down at a table, drew toward her the first newspaper within her reach, and resolved to read it through from the beginning, commencing with the leading article on politics, though she neither understood nor tried to understand what it was all about, nor knew even if the paper were published in Paris, Geneva, or London. Having read the first column, forming each word with her lips, she went on, meaning to read it all through, even the advertisements.

On the second page, her eyes, as if attracted by a loadstone, fell on a little paragraph where the name of Jean Mortier seemed to glow along the lines as if it had been printed in phosphorus.

She felt as if a serpent had stung her bosom, and put up her hand to her breast, rubbing her eyes to keep her eyelids from twitching nervously, as she read :

"The drama of the Bois de Boulogne has just had its epilogue. The murderer of Pierre Mortier, who, as our readers know, had declined to appeal, and who, it was thought, was resigned to his fate, hung himself, yesterday, in his cell. He was to have left Paris the next morning—"

The paper went on to give a few details of the manner in which the suicide was accomplished. It made use of the occasion to criticise the want of proper precautions in the management of prisons.

Gabrielle read the article three times over, that she might get it well into her head, into her heart, into her veins. Then her cold hands let the paper fall.

She looked straight before her, as if, in the distance, she could see that other corpse of a man slain by her own husband, and was comparing it with that of the body she had seen at the morgue. She saw them side by side, as it were, stretched out on the same table. Jean Mortier was more dreadful to look at than even Pierre.

He had no fracture in his head—no steel hammer and no cane had killed him—but Gabrielle fancied she could see the white hands of her husband clasping themselves around Jean Mortier's throat ever tighter and tighter, until the mild, intelligent face of that unhappy man swelled out of shape. It was too horrible.

She caught her breath. She seemed to be strangling, too. Her sigh awoke an old gentleman sitting opposite to her, who was dozing over a number of the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*."

Thinking himself the cause of this sigh of astonishment, and that the lady was scandalized by his nap, the devotee of the "Revue" stammered an excuse, and said, politely:

"Permit me, madame, to ask you for that paper when you have done with it."

Gabrielle's first impulse was to draw it out of his reach. This stranger might chance upon the very paragraph she had been reading; he might understand it, he might guess her secret. Then, suddenly, she pushed the paper from her. The old gentleman spread it over his breast, just as the foreman of the jury had held his paper.

Madame de Monterey rose, stiffly but firmly. She was resolved that she would not faint, and walked slowly out of the reading-room. She walked up the stairs with her hand on the baluster, not to steady herself so that she might not fall, but to strike it, as she mounted every stair, as a protest to herself that she had, and that she would have, all necessary energy.

When in her own room, she went and stood before the glass, and looked at herself earnestly.

"Henceforward, I must learn to deceive. Henceforward, no one must guess my thoughts. Could anybody suspect, from my looks, that I am the wife of a murderer?"

During the morning she had exhausted all tender emotions. Now their source was dry.

"I must enter on my work," she said, half aloud. "The paper makes a mistake. There has been as yet no epilogue to the drama. I shall furnish one."

The idea of a double suicide came into her mind, as she thought of Jean Mortier's.

For one moment it presented itself like a sudden temptation, but it found no resting-place in her mind.

It seemed an attractive thought to die, and to take Gaston with her before the judgment-seat of Him whose judgment is final; to offer in expiation two deaths more.

But self-murder can cure no ills—she and Gaston were not even innocent: the guilty must live and expiate their crimes. Besides, there was Roger, who had claims upon his parents' life and honor.

"Yes, I will live, and *he* must live!" said Gabrielle to herself, firmly.

When she thought of forcing Gaston to make expiation, she

would not allow her mind to dwell upon his crime ; she dreaded to be hindered in her plans by her own sorrow.

Those whom she tried to think about were Roger, Jean Mortier's widow, and his little girl.

Gabrielle had made up her mind to place the decision of her fate in Emilienne's hands ; to do exactly as the upholsterer's wife had done to her—to go and see her, and to say to her :

"You can kill us, disgrace us, and avenge yourselves. What price can I pay you, that will ransom our honor ? All I ask of you is to spare my son."

Truly heroic natures grow calm on the verge of a precipice.

There came into Gabrielle's heart a strange feeling of rest ; of peace that was indestructible.

She sat waiting for her husband ; and, when he came in from his stroll, she was surprised to find that her whole nature did not rise up against him, and that no burning tide of fever ran through all her veins. He said to her, with the affectionate interest he had assumed since morning :

"You are better now—are you not ?"

"Yes ; my suffering this morning has passed away."

"So much the better. Shall we resume our journey to-morrow ?"

"We will leave to-morrow, but we must go back to Paris."

"So soon ?"

"I want to be in Paris."

She said this in a tone of authority. Gaston could not refrain from saying :

"What for ?"

Gabrielle gazed at her husband, trying not to put too much severity into the look she fixed on him.

She only wanted to see by his face if he had read the paper, and if his morning's gayety were, or were not, caused by an increased sense of security now that he knew the man who was not guilty was dead.

As she looked at him, she crumpled the bank-note and Monsieur des Arbois's letter in her pocket.

"I have a duty that I must fulfill," she said, gravely, "a duty in which I want you to combine with me."

There was a slight shade over Gaston's eyes, but he said nothing. He was on his guard.

After a pause, Gabrielle said :

"Jean Mortier's wife is a widow."

Monsieur de Monterey did not seem at all astonished at this announcement. He had heard it, therefore, already. He asked no particulars.

"Is that the reason you want go to Paris?" he murmured.

"Yes—for that only."

"Can't you write to her . . . from here, . . . and send her whatever help you think necessary?"

"Help? What help can hinder that poor woman from grieving for her innocent husband, when she has now no hope of proving him not guilty? We owe more than that to *this* widow."

The words, "we owe," were at once very bold and very threatening. They almost betrayed Gabrielle's conviction of her husband's guilt. And yet Gaston did not seem to be surprised at them; he took them as a natural result of the marriage relation. Still, he felt fear in his secret heart as his wife spoke to him. He stammered :

"What do you mean to do?"

"Whatever Madame Jean Mortier thinks best."

"Has she written to you?" asked Gaston, somewhat eagerly.

"No, She does not yet know that I know her husband was innocent."

Gaston took care to ask no further questions.

Gabrielle went on :

"I shall do anything I can to share the sorrows of the widow and her fatherless child."

"Take care!"

"Take care of what?"

"Why—"

"I am afraid of nothing but my own conscience. It tells me I am right in acting thus. And I intend to listen to it."

Gaston shivered, so that he had great difficulty in hiding his emotion.

"Then," said he, in a sudden burst of resolution, "all I have to do is to make ready for our departure."

"Yes; and to settle the hotel bill."

Gabrielle was tempted to hold out to him the bank-notes received that day from Pondicherry, and see if he would use them; but it was a mere impulse of irony. She could not part with them.

She went back into her chamber.

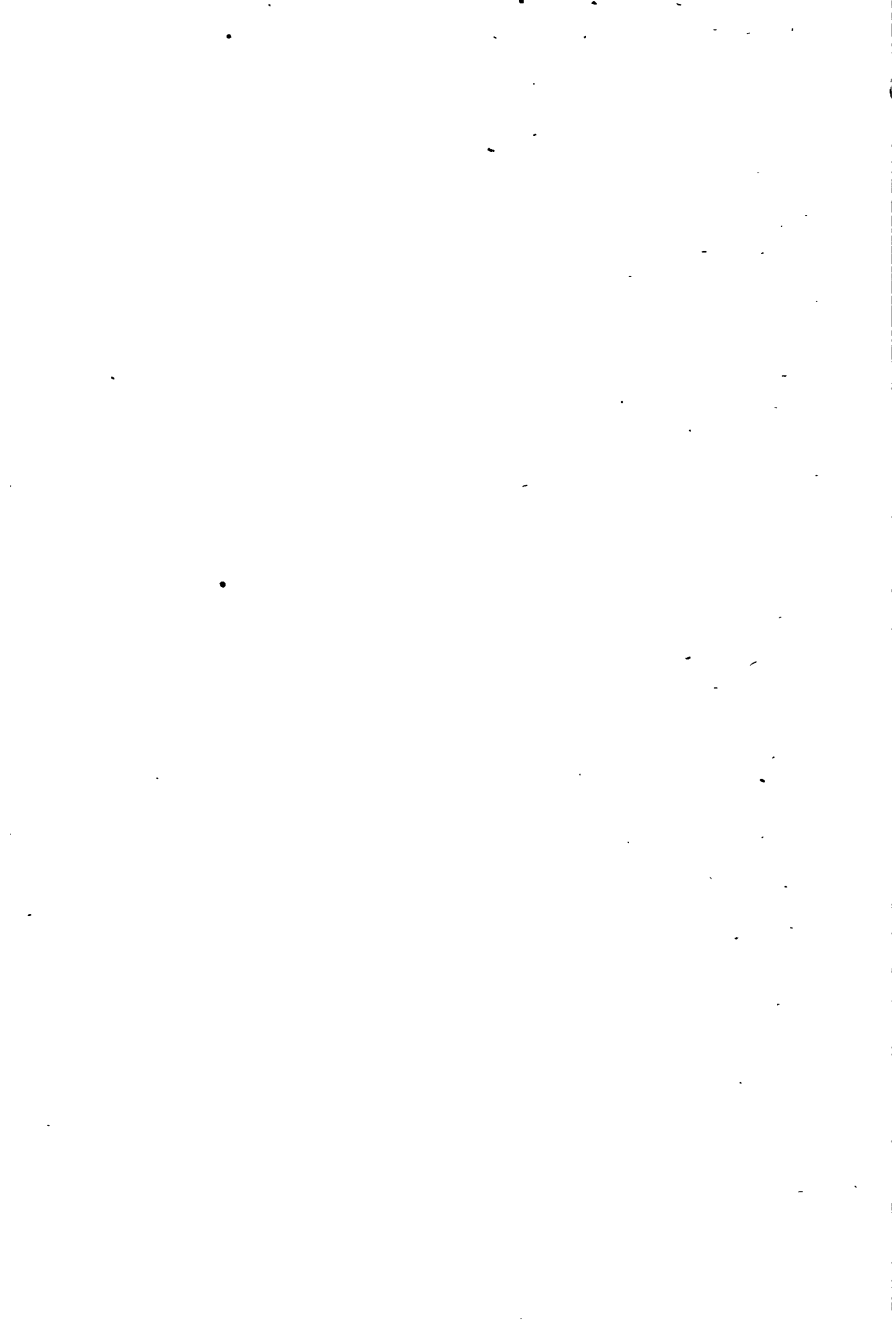
Gaston, as he asked for his bill, and watched the book-keeper adding it up, was thinking :

"She still suspects me. . . . Can she really know ? "

He passed his hand over his face, and felt that it was moist with perspiration. He looked at the moisture on his fingers with a shudder, as if he fancied that they might be tinged with blood !

THE END.

∴ "*For Fifteen Years*," by the same author and translator, constitutes a sequel to "*The Steel Hammer*."



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